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readership for the purpose of discerning the
obedience of faith*

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Editorial

This will be my last issue as Editor of ERT. It has been a privilege and honour to be at the helm since the first issue of October 1977, except between October 1986 and October 1990 when I was involved in pastoral ministry in India. I sense that it is now the time to hand on the baton, especially in view of my heavy responsibilities as General Editor of the Asia Bible Commentary Series. I want to thank especially the Executive Committee of the WEF Theological Commission for their encouragement, Dr David Parker, our Book Review Editor since 1994, John Roxborough, Assistant Editor and my wife Kathleen who has read all the manuscripts and checked the proofs from the beginning 22 years ago. I wish to acknowledge my profound appreciation to our publisher, Jeremy Mudditt and Paternoster Press. From the first issue Jeremy has given himself at great personal cost to our publications. Without his counsel, commitment and encouragement, ERT would have died more than once. Thank you, Jeremy and your supporting staff, for your encouragement.

Our new Editor is yet to be appointed by the Theological Commission executive. We are grateful that Dr David Parker will edit volume 23, 1999.

During the last 30 years we have all been part of societies that have experienced paradigm shifts in culture. The Judeo-Christian consensus of the last millennium has given way to post-modern and neo-pagan cultures that are challenging the Church to the core of its being. The crisis began in the West, but is now rapidly spreading to the so-called Third World. Truth has been privatized and internalized. The social sciences have become our moral arbiter, government legislation on human rights and justice has replaced the authority of Scripture. The arts and media, especially television and more recently the computer, are shaping the worldview and societal morals of the rising generation. The Church is being marginalized and ignored as irrelevant or as a threat to resurgent religions and New Age spiritualities.

Yet our sovereign God is at work in amazing ways throughout the world. Evangelical churches and theological schools are giving an even stronger lead in issues of justice. ERT with its focus on a biblical theology of mission will have an increasing role to play in critiquing contemporary culture, reaffirming the unchanging fundamentals of the gospel and in discerning 'the obedience of faith'. This issue of ERT brings together a number of articles in response to this challenge.

The Biblical Shape of Modern Culture

E. A. Judge

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In this precise, well-documented, and incisive article, the author shows how contemporary ways of thinking and patterns of behaviour are more dependent and congruent with the biblical understanding of the world than is generally recognized. He also dissolves the popular view that biblical concepts had been absorbed into classical culture by the fourth Century, by contrasting the classical and biblical views on

cosmology, epistemology, political thought, ethics and morality. He then raises the question of how Christians are to activate into useful consciousness this debt to biblical understanding.

Editor

Keywords: Culture, Post-Christian, cosmos, creation, Classical thought, biblical theology

The cliché that we are now in a ‘post-Christian’ age is superficial. It no doubt allows for the fact that church-going is no longer a matter of convention, and that it is no longer the fashion to cite the Bible as a public authority (which, in so far as it was only window-dressing, we are better off without). But the cliché misses the much more fundamental fact that contemporary ways of thinking and patterns of behaviour are in vital respects anchored in the biblical understanding of the world.

Even some of the most self-consciously non-Christian movements of the times are in important aspects dependent on, or congruent with, the biblical outlook. In the second century, the Greek philosopher Celsus denounced Christians (and Jews) as grossly exaggerating the importance of man in the universe. Renaissance ‘humanism’ revived this emphasis but its contemporary namesake has forgotten the biblical origin of the focus upon man. ‘Environmentalism’ may look like an attempt to re-identify man with nature, but it is anything but accepting of that fate, and its high sense of answer-ability reflects rather the biblical stewardship of creation. Even ‘post-modernism’, in so far as it seems to be a reaction against attempts to explain everything in merely objective terms, leans towards the biblical way of understanding our being in personal and relational terms.¹

Under the impact of western dynamism the countries which are home to other major cultural traditions have sharpened their interest in the origins of western culture, with particular attention to the biblical contribution. This can be seen not only in Japan and India, but also in contemporary China, where there are universities explicitly developing this interest. New Australians from non-Christian traditions also need this understanding, as a matter of public information. It is not only the province of ‘Christian’ education. Everyone stands to gain from identifying the broad historical influences that have made us all what we are.

This is not to claim a privilege for the West, or to justify imperialism or exploitation. Nor am I implying that the western confusion of classical with biblical ideas or attitudes is somehow more Christian than what emerges with the christianisation of other cultures, in Africa, for example. Nor am I saying that the western pattern marks progress towards the kingdom of God. On the contrary, it contradicts Christ’s mission in many glaring ways. Nevertheless the historic fact remains that it is this particular set of tensions that has now taken over the world and permeates the minds of modern people. By identifying the (now taboo) biblical component of it we shall not only help to explain things better, but also make it easier to put them right.

In what follows I outline in contrapuntal form a few of the major polarities of understanding in which we are all involved. In separating them sharply into classical and biblical categories I am dissolving the great fusion of attitudes which is supposed to have been effected in the fourth century. The reigning historical judgement is that the biblical

¹ There is of course a countervailing paradox. Church people have come to rely in many ways upon the classical world-view that is alien to the New Testament. That is why we prefer to leave passionate commitment to other people, and cultivate instead the carefully modulated life required by the ethics of reasonableness. The fact is that everyone in the West inherits the unresolved contradictions which create its distinctive dynamism, and which have rapidly overrun the rest of the world.

speculating on the observed rhythm of hot and cold. It is rationality (*logos*) itself which is the eternal principle within the *cosmos*.⁵

The great debates amongst the pre-Socratic philosophers opened up rival theories which by the time of Aristotle (c. 330 BC) could be consolidated into a system that accounted for differences within the ultimate unity:

We have already laid down that there is one physical element which makes up the system of the bodies that move in a circle, and besides this four bodies (fire, air, earth, water) owing their existence to the four principles (hot, cold, dry, moist) . . . Fire, air, water, earth, we assert, originate from one another, and each of them exists potentially in each, as all things do that can be resolved into a common and ultimate substrate.⁶

The later Aristotelian tradition developed this:

Heaven is full of divine bodies, which we usually call stars, and moves with a continual motion in one orbit, and revolves in stately measure with all the heavenly bodies unceasingly for ever. Thus then a single harmony orders the composition of the whole—heaven and earth and the whole universe—by the mingling of the most contrary principles [hot/cold, etc.] ... a single power extending through all, which has created the whole universe out of separate and different elements—air, earth, fire, and water—embracing them all on one spherical surface and forcing the most contrasting natures to live in agreement with one another in the universe, and thus contriving the permanence of the whole.⁷

The biblical view of the world is fundamentally different. God exists entirely outside it, he made it from nothing, he controls it, and will bring it to an end. In Aristotelian thought God's existence within the world may be necessary to ensure its eternity; if he is conceived as creator, he makes it out of pre-existing material. The differences are dramatised by Paul. The world is not in beautiful order. Error (*hamartia*) entered the *cosmos*, corrupting it with death ([Rom. 5:12](#)). Far from sensing the perfect music of the spheres, Paul listens to the creation groaning under its bondage to decay ([Rom. 8:21–2](#)), longing for the glory to be revealed (vv. [18–19](#)).

Current cosmology posits an explosive origin for the universe at that point in the finite past when everything was compressed to a state of infinite density, and prior to which it did not exist. In due course it will all implode again and cease to be. This represents the emancipation of science from the logical straitjacket of Hellenic speculation. It is the ultimate product of the methodological revolution which the biblical concept of the world

⁵ Heraclitus, frag. 30, G.S. Kirk, Heraclitus: *The Cosmic Fragments* (London: Cambridge University Press), corrected reprint 1962, frag. 1.

⁶ Aristotle, *Meteorologica*, tr. E.W. Webster (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), (= W.D. Ross (ed.), *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 3), 339 a and b; G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1957), Jonathan Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (London and New York: Routledge, 1979), (repr. 1993), a philosophical treatment.

⁷ Pseudo-Aristotle, *De mundo*, tr. E.S. Forster (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1914), (= W.D. Ross [ed.], *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 3), 391 b and 396 b; for the logical problems involved in speculation at the opposite end of the scale see Andrew Pyle, *Atomism and its Critics: Problem Areas associated with the Development of the Atomic Theory of Matter from Democritus to Newton* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995), and for the rival view of an infinite universe (as distinct from the eternal *cosmos*) that results from starting with the smallest part rather than the whole, see David Furley, 'The cosmological crisis in Classical antiquity', in *Cosmic Problems: Essays on Greek and Roman Philosophy of Nature* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 223–35.

has inspired. The philosophical significance of its outcome matching the biblical scenario has hardly been explored.⁸

The significance of the idea of creation for the understanding of history is much clearer. History as the Greeks fashioned it was an enquiry (*historia*) into human behaviour. Its purpose was to commemorate notable examples, and then to instruct those who might follow them. Its art was rhetorical and its method persuasion. Since political life was a microcosm of the universe, it repeated itself. The best way was already known. Although historians were concerned with the truth of what had happened, and with the quality of their information, it was not part of their practice to lay out detailed evidence. They did not have to prove anything. Too much argument would spoil the ethical value of their display.⁹

By contrast, modern historians are required to prove their points by critical documentation, and to demonstrate how one thing has given rise to another. This is because we pre-suppose that history is developmental. The origin and growth of some phenomenon is our focus, along with its influence and decline. Things will not be the same again. Though the public may want us to say that history repeats itself, we are looking for what is new. This is the imprint upon our culture of the shift from seeing the world as an essentially stable scene to recognizing that everything is on the move from a purposeful beginning to a promised end.¹⁰

What difference does our understanding of the universe make to us? When we seek to work out the pattern of things, and to accept our place in it, we reflect our classical heritage. When we focus upon some goal that we see before us, and respond personally to its challenge, it is our biblically inspired understanding of the way the world works that we rely upon.

HOW DO WE KNOW IT ALL?

(a) **Classical** **logic**
Speculative philosophy supplies logical proofs in science and rhetorical models in history

(b) **Biblical** **experience**
Propositional theology requires empirical testing in science and documentation in history

Greek philosophy begins with observation, and proceeds to explain things by analogy. The Stoics, for example, conceived of the *cosmos* as an organism, while medical writers conversely transferred to the human body the Heraclitan understanding of the universe in terms of physical principles. A fifth-century treatise criticized this:

⁸ W.L. Craig and Q. Smith, *Theism, Atheism and Big Bang Cosmology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), presents a debate on the theme; theism itself remains a classic issue in philosophy: Richard Swinburne, *Is there a God?* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), the absence of God has led M.K. Munitz, *Cosmic Understanding: Philosophy and Science of the Universe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), to postulate a necessary 'Boundless Existence' (of which we can know nothing) in order for us to be able to live at peace with what we do know.

⁹ G.A. Press, *The Development of the Idea of History in Antiquity* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 1982), C.W. Fornara, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1979), G.W. Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought from Antiquity to the Reformation*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

¹⁰ R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), H.I. Marron, *The Meaning of History* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), Arnaldo Momigliano, *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of History* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981).

I am utterly at a loss to know how those who prefer these hypothetical arguments and reduce the science to a simple matter of 'postulates' ever cure anyone on the basis of their assumptions. I do not think that they have ever discovered anything that is purely 'hot' or 'cold', 'dry' or 'wet', without it sharing some other qualities.¹¹

But this objection does not go much beyond insisting that the four 'principles' are in practice mingled to varying degrees. It was much the same with the four 'humours':

This lecture is not intended for those who are accustomed to hear discourses which inquire more deeply into the human constitution than is profitable for medical study. I am not going to assert that man is all air, or fire, or water, or earth . . . Each adds argument and proofs to support his contention, all of which mean nothing. Now, whenever people arguing on the same theory do not reach the same conclusion, you may be sure that they do not know what they are talking about . . . But when we come to physicians, we find that some assert that man is composed of blood, others of bile and some of phlegm . . . The human body contains blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. These are the things that make up its constitution and cause its pains and health. Health is primarily that state in which these constituent substances are in the correct proportion to each other, both in strength and quantity, and are well mixed.¹²

G.E.R. Lloyd related the argumentativeness of Greek science to the premium on debate developed in the small civil communities of the Greeks, citing Aristotle that 'we are all in the habit of relating an inquiry not to the subject matter, but to our opponent in argument'.¹³ This resulted in a desire 'to support, rather than to test, theories' and 'a certain failure in self-criticism' due to 'the quest for certainty in an axiomatic system'.¹⁴

The sense of achievement amongst the very narrow élite within which this debate was conducted led early to the assumption by Aristotle that 'nearly all possible discoveries and knowledge had been secured already'. But the philosophical schools had no sure way of discriminating between the large amounts of 'formalised common knowledge' and of 'fantastic speculation' that they set out.¹⁵ They were classifying everything, but not testing their axioms. Mathematical order fascinated them, but not measurement. There was no lack of inventiveness (the steam engine, for example), but little application of it. As the theories were refined across a millennium, the speculative competition became ever more remote from the general interest.¹⁶

By the second century AD there had been established the vast compendia of observable knowledge that in some fields (Ptolemy on astronomy and geography, Galen on medicine) passed to the Arabs and remained in use until modern times.

Galen is the earliest extant scholar to treat the biblical theology as a serious challenge to the traditional philosophical schools. He recognized both the significance of its

¹¹ 'Tradition in Medicine', Section 1, tr. J. Chadwick and W.N. Mann, *Hippocratic Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 70.

¹² 'The Nature of Man', Sections 1–4, *ibid.*, pp. 260–2.

¹³ Aristotle, *De Caelo* 294b, 7ff.

¹⁴ G.E.R. Lloyd, *Magic, Reason and Experience: Studies in the Origin and Development of Greek Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 266–7.

¹⁵ G.E.R. Lloyd, *The Revolutions of Wisdom: Studies in the Claims and Practice of Ancient Greek Science* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 330 (n. 147) and 335.

¹⁶ S. Sambursky, 'The limits of Greek science' *The Physical World of the Greeks* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), pp. 222–244.

accepting God as the free initiator of things (contradicting the fixity of natural law) and its implied rejection of logical demonstration or proof in favour of experimental testing as the way of discovering how things worked. Galen likened this to the method of an unidentified medical school who called themselves 'purists':

- (a) They compare those who practise medicine without scientific knowledge to Moses, who framed laws for the tribe of the Jews, since it is his method in his books to write without offering proofs, saying, 'God commanded, God spoke'.
- (b) Is not this Moses' way of treating nature, and is it not superior to that of Epicurus? The best way, of course, is to follow neither of these but to maintain like Moses the principle of the demiurge as the origin of every created thing, while adding the material principle to it . . . For Moses it seems enough to say that God simply willed the arrangement of matter and it was presently arranged in due order . . . We however do not hold this; we say that certain things are impossible by nature and that God does not even attempt such things at all but that he chooses the best out of the possibilities of becoming.
- (c) For Archigenes talks about what is spoken of, not among all, but only among the purists, and again I do not know who they are, although I wanted to know this to consider whether they may be believed without a proof or not. For I learned from Aristotle that probable statements are those approved by all people, or by the majority, or by the wise. Yet I do not know if we should consider the purists as being tantamount to the wise. I should have thought it much more proper to add some adequate reason, if not a cogent reason, to the argument about the eight qualities (sc. of the pulse). Thus one would not, at the very start, as if one had come into the school of Moses or Christ, hear about laws that have not been demonstrated . . . He [Archigenes] did not consider it necessary to guide us by any logical method but adopted an empirical fashion of teaching, saying that eight qualities are spoken of by the purists.¹⁷

In spite of Galen's perceptiveness, the school of Moses and Christ did not quickly press home the methodological implication of their radically new starting point.¹⁸ Many of their best thinkers in later antiquity were as much concerned to come to terms with the principles of Greek rationality.¹⁹ It soon fell to the churches themselves to maintain the old culture (essential as it seemed to education).²⁰ A thousand years after Galen, the Aristotelian corpus was resuscitated in the West, thanks to the brilliant use of it made by the Arabs, and imposed on Catholicism as the correct philosophical partner for theology.

¹⁷ R. Walzer, *Galen on Jews and Christians* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949); (a) cited from the Arabic translation of Galen's *On Hippocrates' Anatomy* (Walzer, p. 11); (b) from *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* xi 14 (Walzer, p. 12); (c) from *On the Differences between the Pulses* ii 4; the Greek texts, with Walzer's translations, are also reproduced in M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 2, *From Tacitus to Simplicius*, (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1980), pp. 306–15.

¹⁸ R.M. Grant, *Miracle and Natural Law in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Thought* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1952).

¹⁹ Henry Chadwick, *Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Mystery of Continuity: Time and History, Memory and Eternity in the Thought of St Augustine* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986); and *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); J.M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁰ R.A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

The consequences for scientific method of distinguishing the world from God were not decisively applied until the seventeenth century, in the wake of the Renaissance and Reformation, though the implications of the doctrine of creation for the direct testing of all phenomena had been seen by the nominalists in the fourteenth century.²¹ The immediate trigger for the success of the experimental method has been detected in various quarters: the Portuguese navigators who proved Ptolemy wrong, the Protestant ethic, or the Puritans and the Royal Society. But there is no serious disagreement over the intellectual changes that resulted. As Hooykaas writes (p.455), one may identify in the seventeenth century that critical empiricism triumphed over rationalism (self-sufficiency of theoretical reason); that nature was not merely observed but mastered by experimental art; the universe was no longer explained as an organism, but in the mechanical terms; and a new emphasis on the quantification of data (measurement, statistics). Thus the huge upswing in knowledge and understanding that mark out modern times is linked to the liberating effect of the biblical view of the world over the rational system of the Greeks.²²

A clear-cut marker of the seventeenth-century turning point may be seen in Harvey's demonstration of the circulation of the blood.²³ For nearly two thousand years the study of the pulses had been dominated by the doctrines of Herophilus, the great Alexandrian physician who had used the openness of Egypt in the handling of the dead (in contrast with Greek taboos) actually to dissect the human cadaver. The standard doctrine was that veins carried blood while breath was pumped along the arteries.²⁴ The blood that rushed out when you cut one was only trying to seal the leakage in the air-passage. (Herophilus discovered the nervous system, which he conjectured also worked as a series of air-ducts.) The rhythm of the pulses was interpreted by Herophilus in terms of the metrical patterns of Greek music. He devised a water-clock to measure them. The prudent Galen protested at the imprecision.²⁵ Yet the issue had to lie another 1500 years for solution by controversialists working from different intellectual premises.

²¹ A.E. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

²² R. Hooykaas, 'The rise of modern science: when and why?', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 1987, 20, pp. 453–73 and 'Science and reformation', *Journal of World History*, 1956, 3, pp. 109–139; see also M.B. Foster, 'The Christian doctrine of creation and the rise of modern natural science', *Mind*, 1934, 43, pp. 446–68, repr. in C.A. Russell (ed.), *Science and Religious Belief: A Selection of Recent Historical Studies* (London: Open University Press, 1973), pp. 294–315; Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904); R.K. Merton, 'Science, technology and society in seventeenth century England', *Osiris*, 1938, 4, pp. 360–632, repr. with 'Preface: 1970' under its own title (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), and *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1973); I.B. Cohen (ed.), *Puritanism and the Rise of Modern Science: The Merton Thesis* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990); J.H. Brooke, 'Science and religion', in R.C. Olby et al. (eds.), *Companion to the History of Modern Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 763–82; A. Kleinman, 'What is specific to Western medicine?', in W.F. Bynum and R. Porter (eds.), *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), vol. 1, pp. 15–23; A.C. Crombie, *Styles of Scientific Thinking in the European Tradition: The History of Argument and Explanation Especially in the Mathematical and Biomedical Sciences and Arts* (London: Duckworth, 1994), 3 vols.

²³ R. French, *William Harvey's Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁴ H. von Staden, *Herophilus: The Art of Medicine in Early Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). See also Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis* xi 89.219: *spiritus semitae*, 'passages for the breath'.

²⁵ See von Staden *ibid.* nos. 182 and 174; also D.J. Furley and J.S. Wilkie, *Galen on Respiration and the Arteries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), (not seen by me).

In the field of history there was also a long-delayed reaction to the implications of the biblical world-view. At the level of how the course of world affairs was understood, W.B. Glover writes:

The transcendence of God and man means that history is free from the limitations of a determined natural order and that the future is open to novelty. Cyclical explanations of the ultimate reality man confronts are, therefore, no longer adequate. As awareness of this historical reality permeated the Western consciousness, modern man achieved a radically new mode of self-consciousness and of being aware of the world. He experienced a new sense of responsibility for his own future and for the future of the world.²⁶

There was also a methodological transformation. The documents and footnotes that mark the modern professional writing of history are signals of our concern for authentic evidence as distinct from the historian's well-informed judgement of probability, with the actual words of those we write about as distinct from our interpretation of them, with data as distinct from display. We have to prove our points, rather than present them. In antiquity such a concern for authenticity belongs to the tradition of the philosophical schools, where adherence to the master's authority led to the digesting of his lectures, while documentary proof belongs in the law-courts, where one had to produce written evidence or witnesses to establish one's claim. It was not a part of the writing of history; for classical historians to have included such raw material would have been inelegant, and it had to be processed into a more rhetorically persuasive form.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, however, incorporated into his history the documents guaranteeing the freedom of Jewish communities in Greek and Roman states. His history has acquired an objective of legally valid proof that is remote from the didactic purpose of history. Eusebius, the first Christian historian, called his work *ekklesiastike historia*, perhaps on the analogy of the lost *philosophos historia* and *philologos historia* of his contemporary (and severe critic of the churches), Porphyry. We possess still the earlier *philosophos historia* of Galen. As with Eusebius, a 'philosophical history' is not one that interprets general history from a particular philosophical perspective, but one that establishes the succession of authorities within the school across the centuries, and details their main doctrines. In the case of Eusebius, it is precisely because he means to set out the orthodox succession to the major episcopal sees that he has incorporated into his work *in extenso* a huge range of material excerpted from earlier writers. The 'ecclesiastical history' is an historical source-book. The implications of this concern for proving authenticity were not, however, at the time carried over into general historical practice.

It was not until early modern times—the sixteenth century—with massive disputes over the legitimacy of States, and above all the counter-claims of Catholics and Protestants over which was the true heir to the practice of the first churches, that the principle of proof from documentary evidence was established as the foundation for the scholarly study of history.²⁷ As in the field of natural science, it is the conflict over fundamental claims which produces the revolution in method.

HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE?

²⁶ W.B. Glover, *Biblical Origins of the Modern Secular Culture: An Essay in the Interpretation of Western History* (Macon: Mercer University Press, Macon, 1984), pp. 9–10.

²⁷ J.G.A. Pocock, 'The Origins of the Study of the Past', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1961–2, 4, pp. 209–46.

(a) **Classical** **order**
People have their proper places determined by natural aptitudes; the republican state ensures harmony through selective participation

(b) **Biblical** **community**
Everyone has a personal mission, being endowed with gifts to make responsible choices; an open society helps each support the good of others

If speculative philosophy was the first great distinctive of Greek culture, the second was the republican state. Both were premised on the axiom of a natural order. The sophists had debated whether one should live according to nature (*physis*) or to law (*nomos*). Aristotle resolved the dilemma by asserting that to live under law (or convention) was itself man's nature: 'man is by nature a political animal'.²⁸ To be without a state (*polis*) was to be either sub-human or super-human:

Further, the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part . . . The proof that the state is a creation of nature and prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing . . . But he who . . . has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state.

By similar lines of reasoning Aristotle also concluded (1254b):

Again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind. It is clear, then, that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and for these latter slavery is both expedient and right.

These strenuous doctrines are part of a far-reaching argument, in which of course many other considerations arise, yet they remain lasting landmarks of the basic character of Greek political thought, much of which persists to our own day. It is essentially a rationalising defence of the established order. Both constitutional debate and utopian dreams formed part of that tradition. But what was fundamentally absent was any belief that the existing order should be reformed or overthrown.²⁹

Athenian democracy became the ideal of government throughout the rest of antiquity and into modern times. In important ways it was more drastically egalitarian than anything we might call 'democracy'—above all in the use of the lot to fill all the executive and judicial functions of government (except for military commands): this survives with us only in the (much criticised) jury system. The practice of election was thought to be aristocratic, since obviously one elects only the best!³⁰ Yet the principle of direct participation applied only to the minority who enjoyed citizenship in small, local states. Increasingly, this implicitly timocratic principle ('rule of honour/wealth') was accentuated by Roman patronage. Status was supreme. By AD 212, when the whole free

²⁸ Politics 1253 a. Citations are from S. Everson (ed.), *Aristotle: The Politics* (Cambridge 1988), the translation being the revision by Jonathan Barnes of that of Benjamin Jowett; in addition to studies listed in its 'Bibliographical note', there is a collection edited by D. Kent and F.D. Miller, *A Companion to Aristotle's Politics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), and F.D. Miller, *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle's Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

²⁹ For a range of extracts see P.J. Rhodes, *The Greek City States: A Source Book* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986); Ernest Barker, *From Alexander to Constantine: Passages and Documents Illustrating the History of Social and Political Ideas, 336 BC-AD 337* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).

³⁰ R.K. Sinclair, *Democracy and Participation in Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

population of the Mediterranean was granted Roman citizen rank *en bloc*, the ideas of the world-state and of law incarnate in the sovereign went hand in hand.

In the same period the classical world heard for the first time the principle now embedded in civilised standards, that in the last resort each person must take the responsibility for deciding where truth lay. There was an ultimate law, higher than Caesar, said the Christian writer Origen:

Celsus' first main point in his desire to attack Christianity is that the Christians secretly make associations with one another contrary to the laws, because 'societies which are public are allowed by the laws, but secret societies are illegal' . . . As he makes much of 'the common law' saying that 'the associations of the Christians violate this', I have to make this reply . . . it is not wrong to form associations against the laws for the sake of truth.³¹

This extraordinary claim arose from the civil novelty of a quasi-nation forming itself in contradiction of its inherited national culture. The Jews could be understood (though alternately protected and suppressed) because they lived, though in exile, according to a well documented and respected national tradition of their own. The Christians, from the earliest stages alienated from Judaism, nevertheless assumed its heritage and insisted on abandoning their own. To the Romans this constituted an act of political sedition (as the very formation of the name 'Christianus' signifies).³²

When the Roman emperor Galerius finally abandoned the attempt to impose cultural conformity, he stated in his 'edict of toleration':

. . . through some strange reasoning such wilfulness had seized the said Christians and such folly possessed them that, instead of following those institutions of the ancients which their own ancestors no doubt had first established, they were making themselves laws for their own observance, merely according to their own judgement, and as their pleasure was, and were forming deviant communities on alternative principles (*per diversa varios populos congregarent*) . . .³³

Thus was born 'the alternative society' as well as 'multi-culturalism'. The idea of inner withdrawal had had a long history in philosophy.³⁴ At the communal level it ran its course in dreams or small-group retreats. Monasticism found similar solutions, in reaction against the official establishment of Christianity by Constantine in the years immediately following the death of Galerius. But the New Testament demand that the principles of the kingdom of God be practised on earth by the citizens of heaven generated social action on a community-wide scale.

Julian, Constantine's last heir, who hoped to reverse the tide, was outraged that the 'Galileans' were actually providing for the needs of the poor amongst the 'Hellenes'. Augustine, half a century later, reports in a newly found letter how action groups from his church rescued hundreds of victims of the press-gangs (which were ostensibly acting

³¹ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.1 (tr. Chadwick); E.A. Judge, 'The Beginning of Religious History', *Journal of Religious History*, 1989, 15, pp. 394–412.

³² E.A. Judge, 'Judaism and the rise of Christianity: a Roman perspective', *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies*, 1993, 7, pp. 80–98, reproduced in *Tyndale Bulletin* 1994, 45, pp. 355–368.

³³ Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, 34 (citing the edict of 30 April 311), tr. adapted from that of J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to AD 337*, revised W.H.C. Frend (London: SPCK, 1987), p. 280.

³⁴ P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995).

within the law), seizing them in the docks before they could be shipped abroad, and billeting them until their relatives could come for them.³⁵

When we insist upon national values, and stress the importance of everyone playing their part in the lawful public order for the sake of social harmony, we are echoing our classical culture. But when we insist upon our personal commitments, challenge reigning conventions, and accept it as our mission to persuade others to our cause and to live differently from the majority, we are picking up the freedom that was won on the biblical understanding of how we are to live as a new community in this world. Today everyone admires the integrity of the latter stance, while most of us settle for the comforts of the former.³⁶

WHAT IS WRONG WITH US?

(a) **Classical** **ethics**
Our problem comes from a tragic lack of foresight and moderation; education will ensure we do our duty with equanimity, while suffering is accepted as the just recompense for deficiencies.

(b) **Biblical** **morality**
Our problem is not so much cosmic as psychic—there is an enemy within; we refuse to do what we know we should; conscience condemns us, yet we insist on its demands, while meeting suffering in others with compassion despite their sins.

The tragic view of life saw man as the victim of his own success. To step beyond one's settled place in the scheme of things, for however good an intention, only provoked the nemesis that cut everything down to size. A simple error of judgement might set one on the fatal course. An ethical education would train one in moderation, and above all in keeping one's balance in the shocks of encounter with others.

Greek ethics, although treating the duties each owes another by virtue of his position in the public order, is essentially concerned with self-management. Friendship is a reflection of one's self-interest.³⁷ Emotional involvement with others, whether through pity or cruelty, fear or love, will threaten the harmony of the soul. Commitments will have to be paid for.³⁸

The ideal is not action, but being. Work was done in order to win leisure:

³⁵ E.A. Judge, 'Ancient beginnings of the modern world', *Ancient History: Resources for Teachers*, 1993, 23, pp. 125–48.

³⁶ The Augustinian approach to being at once a citizen of this world and of the city of God has been recently applied in philosophy, by Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988); in government, by Graham Walker, *Moral Foundations of Constitutional Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); and in sociology, by John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); on the resulting pluralism, see Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); James Tully (ed.), *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: the Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); David Archard (ed.), *Philosophy and Pluralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

³⁷ J. Benson, 'Making friends: Aristotle's doctrine of the friend as another self', in A. Loizou and H. Lesser (eds.), *Polis and Politics: Essays in Greek Moral and Political Philosophy* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1990), pp. 50–68.

³⁸ The famous distillations of Greek wisdom into gnomic form give a clear picture of how ethical values were inculcated over the ages in Greek popular education: W.T. Wilson, *The Mysteries of Righteousness: The Literary Composition and Genre of the Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides*, (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1994) J.C. Thom, *The Pythagorean Golden Verses*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995).

Nature herself . . . requires that we should be able, not only to work well, but use leisure well; for . . . the first principle of all action is leisure. Both are required, but leisure is better than occupation, and is its end.³⁹

The term 'morals' comes from the Latin for 'ethics'. Both words refer basically to custom, but we habitually use them for rather different types of behaviour in relation to each other. Most people would find it hard to define the difference, yet they are not exactly interchangeable. Nonetheless, ever since Nietzsche wrote *Die Genealogie der Moral*, explaining morality as a biblical imposition on our culture,⁴⁰ there has been no doubt as to its historical origin.

Contemporary philosophers are engrossed with the phenomenon.⁴¹ In spite of the displacement of God from the intellectual agenda, and from the public one in Australia (though not in the US), everyone in the community has a powerful moral sense shaped by the biblical tradition. The problem is how to justify it if the source has been discarded.⁴²

Whereas ethics can be rationally defined in terms of effective patterns of behaviour, and thus are self-regulating, morals require there to be someone else who places the obligation upon you. By 'morality' we mean now, not well balanced behaviour, but answerability to an external source of authority (God, or some less defined substitute for him). When we campaign for our causes we are often applying to other people the moral constraint we feel ourselves. If we cannot refer to its source in the divine commands, we are left with a mysterious pressure that we cannot rationally justify.

If morality turns ethics inside out by causing us to feel obligations to others often to our own disadvantage, it also causes us to look far more deeply inside ourselves for the source of our problems. Classical psychology had no developed treatment of either the will or the conscience, nor did it seek the heart of the human dilemma in the inner man. There was no autobiography in classical antiquity, in the sense of a retrospective disclosure of motives and emotions. That began with Paul, and was carried to an extreme by Augustine. It is thanks to them that everyone is now engrossed with the personal life. There were no psychological novels in antiquity.

Paradoxically, our inward-looking preoccupations go hand-in-hand with an activist approach to personal relations. Far from guarding our serenity against the shocks of contact, we value involvement. We believe we should always do something, and not just be. This highly personal, as opposed to naturalistic, sense of our relations with each other stems from our understanding of the world as the domain of the personal God. In particular, when we listen to him speaking in his Son, and are open to the gifts of his Spirit, we are drawn into personal relationship not with some 'boundless existence' but with the source of all reality revealed as personal being.⁴³

³⁹ Aristotle, *Politics* 1337b (n. 28 above).

⁴⁰ E. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, K. Ansell-Pearson (ed.) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 19; see also B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985), p. 198.

⁴¹ M. Smiley, *Moral Responsibility and the Boundaries of Community: Power and Accountability from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992); J.E.J. Altham and R. Harrison, *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995); D. Copp, *Morality, Normativity and Society* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁴² R.G. Poole, *Morality and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁴³ A.D. Momigliano, 'The disadvantages of monotheism for a universal state', *Classical Philology*, 1986, 81, pp. 285–297, reprinted in *Ottava Contributo . . .*, Rome, 1987, pp. 313–328.

Whenever modern people speak of their commitments, when they feel an obligation, when they look for the opportunity to make their contribution to the community, and in many other behavioural patterns, they express the imprint upon them of the biblical morality and its author.

The Bible, unfashionable as it may be today, has shaped the development of many basic patterns of our culture. There remains the question of how to activate this heritage into useful consciousness. The appeal to the Bible itself is felt to be oppressive.⁴⁴ Through cultural criticism perhaps we shall find an avenue to re-open the Bible as a public good.⁴⁵ At least we should be able to remind our contemporaries of the debt they owe to biblical thinking in the development of the norms they cherish.

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Culture and Revelation

Allan Harman

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Despite the need for updating, this article published ten years ago outlines with clarity the hermeneutical tension between the adaptation and application of the biblical text to the plurality of our cultural contexts today. The author outlines the complexity of assessing the cultural elements in revelation, the dangers of cultural relativism and suggests methodological guidelines. He points to the Reformation principles of the Analogy of Faith and the perspicuity of Scripture as a whole as the way forward in this demanding task.
Editor

Keywords: Culture, contextualisation, cultural relativism, revelation

The problem of relating the Bible to modern readers is an old one, even though the terminology employed to describe it might be new. Thus we find that the term 'contextualisation' has come into vogue to describe the task. This term dates from only around 1972 when it was first used in a World Council of Churches document. Shoki Coe and Aharoan Sapsezian, directors of the Theological Education Fund of the W.C.C., in their report *Ministry and Context*, used the term 'contextualisation' as going beyond what was implied by 'indigenisation'. While both terms were originally used in missiological settings, 'contextualisation' is now being used to describe the broader process of interpreting and applying the biblical teaching in any given cultural environment.

⁴⁴ Paradoxically it was the development of biblical criticism by the English deists that triggered the Enlightenment humanism whose pseudo-objectivity we are at last discounting; Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (London: SCM, 1984).

⁴⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

Linguistic and anthropological studies have given greater impetus to the task and also provided models from other disciplines to use in this area of biblical study.

Within the Scriptures there is clear evidence of contextualisation, with the Incarnation itself being the pre-eminent example. The speeches in Acts provide excellent examples of how the same message could be adapted to very varied audiences. Likewise in Acts and in the epistles there are practical illustrations of the gospel being contextualised (cf. [Acts 15:1-29](#); [1 Cor. 8:1-10](#); [22](#)). Perhaps Paul's words in [1 Corinthians 9:19-23](#) present the model for contextualisation for in them we have a declaration that he could accept the life-style and stand where his hearers stood in order to fulfil his evangelistic goal.

The task of contextualisation is a complex one. This is because it involves a variety of factors including the original context of the various biblical books, the time gap between the various books and later readers, and the context of the readers today. If we take the first of these, it is soon apparent that for the Bible the task is much more difficult than for other ancient books because it is composed of a wide variety of literature, stems from various cultures, and is written over an extensive period of time. Since the original message was given in a contextualised form the task is that of decontextualisation, i.e., freeing it of those features which were appropriate to the original context but not an intrinsic part of the message, before proceeding to recontextualise it in a contemporary setting.

I. PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES

Pursuit of this task involves problems and difficulties and some of them can be outlined.

1. It is hard to be sure that we know sufficient about every biblical writer's context to determine with precision what were contextual features of his writing. For example, for the Old Testament one can instance the explanations of the patriarchal narratives on the basis of interpretation of the Nuzi texts, or the employment of Ugaritic material to elucidate Old Testament words and concepts. When the interpretation of the extra-biblical material is so dubious, great care has to be exercised or the outcome is that a false (or at best, an imperfect) understanding of extra-biblical material becomes the controlling factor in biblical interpretation. Extra-biblical material is a useful tool, but should not be allowed to dominate the exegetical process. Similarly, New Testament examples can be cited such as commentators' suggestion that the reason for Paul's admonition in regard to women having their heads covered was because the uncovered head was a sign of a prostitute in Corinth. In this case the attempt at a cultural explanation for the practice falls into difficulties. We do not know that the suggested explanation was in fact any part of the background of the Corinthian letters. More importantly, we do know that the explanation is in direct conflict with Paul's own explanation which is unrelated to a cultural framework.

2. The task of recontextualization has to be understood as involving several dimensions.¹ The first dimension attempts to cover the time gap between say the writings of the New Testament in the first century and our own setting at the end of the 20th century. The second dimension is the breadth of cultural patterns present at any particular time. This involves not only an assessment of the cultural differences for example between East and West, but the innumerable differences which exist within both East and West. The third dimension is concerned with the varieties of understanding which exist within any one cultural pattern at any one time. Contextualisation has to be related to the capabilities of various groups within a society and expressed in terms which

¹ I am here following the helpful discussion in Millard Erikson, *Christian Theology* (Baker, 1987), pp. 75ff.

they can comprehend. The difficulty here is in maintaining a correct balance between these dimensions, as they all have a bearing whenever a person attempts to communicate to someone else what they have learned of the original text.

3. There is often confusion of thinking between understanding contextualisation as adaptation on the one hand, or application on the other. Sometimes the terms 'transformers' and 'translators' are used of those who practise these two methods respectively. Adaptation has as its focal point man and his context (both ancient and modern) and displays a willingness to effect radical change in order to fit biblical teaching into a particular cultural context. This means that the Scripture is not only conditioned by culture but bound by it. The process may well commence in a legitimate attempt to contextualise biblical concepts and language, but degenerate 'into the arbitrary imposition of conceptual structures, whose genius and control spring from authoritative voices alien to the Bible itself, onto the Bible itself'.² Application is rather the taking of biblical norms of doctrine and conduct and applying them to particular situations, and in so doing, keep those norms fully operative. While recognizing that the content of the gospel does not change, application has more to do with the methodology of using the Scripture. In fact any theology which does not end in application has no real claim to be genuine theology.³

4. The debates concerning contextualisation are inter-connected with various philosophical and theological ideas. Thus many discussions start from a stand-point which assumes that there is no objective truth at all. The application of a hermeneutic to the Bible has as its goal not 'what is true', but rather 'what is true for me'. This is linked with the idea that when I come to an ancient text it must first translate me, before I can translate it. In essence an anthropological approach has been substituted for a theological one.⁴

5. As a corollary to the preceding point, there is a very real danger that unless the boundaries are clearly defined for the text of contextualizing, we arrive at a position of cultural relativism. The task then becomes not one of trying to define what an ancient text meant but *only* what it means for me. The result of this is to make a particular culture so time-bound that we cannot say that our predecessors were either right or wrong in their thinking, nor can we say anything about our successors. Taken to its logical conclusion this would render the idea of objective divine revelation impossible, as well as making theology itself a culture-bound phenomenon. There could be no core of truth or basic abiding principles of belief and practice which are universally applicable and able to be passed on to those of another culture.

There can be no denying that there are cultural differences between biblical writers and ourselves. But these differences are not total, and investigation has to be made to ascertain just where the lines of divergence and agreement lie. Without such investigation we cannot decide *a priori* what we share with ancient writers. When we come to the

² D.A. Carson, 'A Sketch of the Factors Determining Current Hermeneutical Debate in Cross-cultural Contexts', *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Content*, ed. D.A. Carson (Paternoster, 1984), p. 18.

³ Cf. the words of Harvie Conn: 'I argue that if theology is to be biblical theology, it ends, not in the self-assurance of an exegetical job well done, but in the re-appraisal again of those demands and solutions we originally brought to it at the initiation of our participation in the "hermeneutical circle" ', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 2, 2 (Oct. 1978), p. 234.

⁴ For good discussions on the philosophical background, see A.C. Thiselton, 'The New Hermeneutic', *New Testament interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I.H. Marshall (Paternoster, 1977), pp. 308–333, and the shorter summary of D.A. Carson, *op. cit.* pp. 11–29.

biblical documents we have to ask how dependent is the written material on underlying cultural presuppositions. This means that there are two basic aspects of our investigation which require attention. We have to decide how far cultural presuppositions have intruded into biblical revelation so that they have become part of it, and then secondly to assess whether our understanding of the general cultural background of the Bible is to influence our interpretation of the biblical writings.⁵

6. Another difficulty relates to language and the distinction between translation and application. All biblical truths come to us in a cultural way, and the language used by the biblical writers and by ourselves is part of a total cultural milieu. While from one aspect religious language is different because of God's transcendence, yet on the other hand it is also ordinary language.⁶ Because it is ordinary language it is affected by changes in meaning. Two aspects of change can be mentioned. When attempting to translate, interpret and apply the biblical teaching, we face the pressing contemporary problem that many words have changed their meanings. This applies not just to archaic words but especially to value words which have often assumed a derogatory meaning. There is also grammatical transformation taking place, which shows an evolution of self-consciousness which has affected our speech patterns. As an example, think of the many participles which are now used as adjectives (charming, understanding, thrilling, amazing, etc). When used as adjectives the unexpressed object of the verb is really the speaker. Thus a thrilling address means thrilling *to me*. In particular, speech about God is affected, and there is the constant danger that instead of translation we have intrusive interpretation. In translating 'we are not at liberty to act as though the world of the ancient Near East was not radically different from our own, or to pretend that the original text is not saying something different from what we might choose to say on the subject, if we translate responsibly. Application of a text—study of it—is open to cultural accommodation and discussion; translation is not'.⁷

7. It is also important to remember that in approaching the biblical text we are not just coming to ancient documents like other Near Eastern or classical writings. We are approaching what claims to be God's revelation, and which needs spiritual illumination if we are to understand it. Even our fact-finding endeavours have to be performed on the basis of what is contained in the Scriptures. To understand the world we have to see it through the glasses which God himself provides. Calvin uses this analogy in the *Institutes* to underscore the idea that the source of all true knowledge has to come from God's witness to himself.⁸

II. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL ELEMENTS IN REVELATION

Acceptance of the authority of the Bible does not mean the end of all our difficulties. Rather it marks the beginning of problems of interpretation which will always be with us. In seeking to be obedient to its claims, our problem is twofold. On the one hand, we

⁵ In these two paragraphs I have utilized arguments found in Paul Helm, *Divine Revelation* (Marshall, Morgan and Scott), pp. 47–55.

⁶ Cf. John Frame, 'God and Biblical Language: Transcendence and Immanence', *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. J.W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), pp. 159–177, 159–177.

⁷ D.L. Jeffery, 'Inclusivity and Our Language of Worship', the *Reformed Journal*, 37, 8 (1987), p. 17. See his whole discussion (pp. 13–22) for a most stimulating approach.

⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.VI.2.

understand all too well many injunctions (e.g. 'Do all things without murmuring or disputing'), but have difficulty in obeying. On the other hand, there is the problem, which is at present our concern, of distinguishing between principles and customs. All Christians who accept the authority of the Bible make a distinction between the two, or otherwise they would find themselves bound by numerous injunctions which they could not possibly obey. It is in the area of what constitutes the basis on which we make the distinction that opposing viewpoints are brought to the fore. In assessing the impact of the culture of biblical writers upon their writings and of our culture upon the way in which we apply the gospel today we are faced with decisions in regard to what is of continuing validity for Christian practice.

If we take a practice like women covering their heads ([1 Cor. 11](#)), there are four basic positions we can adopt.⁹

1. It is entirely customary. This position assumes that the practice was one required in the cultural setting at Corinth, but not necessary in another culture in which there is no submission of the female to the male and therefore there is no need to have a veil or hat covering the head.

2. It is entirely principle. This viewpoint holds that the submission of the woman is universally applicable, and that it must be in the form described in the Corinthian passage.

3. It is partly principle. Option A. This position maintains that the principle of female submission remains valid. However, the manner by which women in Corinth expressed that principle was a cultural one, and it can be changed from culture to culture.

4. It is partly principle. Option B. The final position maintains that both the submission and the means of expressing it are perpetual, though the covering may be altered to suit the demands of a particular culture. Thus, a hat is acceptable in countries where veils are not in common use.

These distinctions can be seen in many of the discussions which take place on New Testament practices. It is a very complex area and some guidelines have to be held in order to help make decisions in particular cases.

III. GUIDELINES

1. In establishing our methodology we have to recognize that there are three important steps in the process.

- a. We have to understand the original setting of a biblical passage and seek to ascertain the meaning the author intended his readers to understand and which is conveyed by his words.
- b. Proceeding from that first point, we have to reflect on what was the revelation addressed to the particular situation and the response which it was intended to elicit.
- c. Only after the first two steps can we go on to ask how that same revelation is addressed to our situation today.

In order to arrive at the third point, there can be no escape from pursuing the first two. Moreover, the order of our task is important. To come to an understanding of the biblical revelation we must approach it by historical-grammatical exegesis. That is to say, a

⁹ The illustration is borrowed from R.C. Sproul, 'Controversy at the Culture Gap', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 2, 2 (October, 1978), p. 84).

passage is interpreted according to the natural sense of the words and in accordance with our understanding of the historical context in which it was given and received.

I have deliberately referred to the meaning which the author intended to convey. We are unable to discover what processes went on in an author's mind, because we cannot *be* that person. What we have are the words that were written, and the task is to study them and come to an understanding of what they mean. Speaker (or writer) analysis in the case of biblical documents can only be discourse analysis projected back onto the speaker, for the only source of the speakers' intentions is the extant text.¹⁰

There has been much discussion of the *sensus plenior* or 'fuller meaning' which God may have intended a particular passage to convey. Even when the fuller meaning is homogenous with the literal sense¹¹, the determination of any 'fuller meaning' appears to become very subjective. The fact that the New Testament writers declare more from an Old Testament passage than the original writers or recipients understood, is no justification for our attempt to act similarly.

2. There has to be careful analysis of any particular biblical passage to see if it has reference to customs which are purely cultural or to institutions which are of divine appointment. There are many cultural features in the Bible which can be changed without affecting the message. Language itself is one of those features. Hebrew and Greek are not sacred languages which cannot be translated into other languages, for clearly from within the Bible there is evidence that the message can be conveyed in various linguistic forms. Other features provide greater degrees of difficulty, especially in the areas of institutions. It is helpful to distinguish between institutions which are *recognized* and those which are positively *ordained*. Thus the principle of submission to the civic authority structure of the Roman Empire does not imply that we must use that as a model for all civic authorities. On the other hand, the authority of the home is based on a positive command in [Genesis 2](#) and reiterated many times in the Scripture.

3. There has to be the recognition that while revelation came through particular cultural settings, yet revelation constantly challenged those cultures. At times, even when in the biblical text there is reference to specific features associated with a culture, the biblical revelation has often already decontextualized those features and either uses them in a polemical way or in order to infuse well-known expressions with new meaning. Thus, for example, the opening chapter of Genesis appears to employ Near Eastern concepts and expressions in a polemical way, while Paul in his epistles gives words familiar from the Greek mystery religions a new Christian context. Ultimately the meaning of words and phrases must be ascertained from the biblical context, not from the culture with which they may have been shared.

4. We have to place the emphasis on the didactic passages of Scripture for discovering the elements of its teaching which are transcultural. To put this another way, we have to insist that the essential material which is transcultural in the Bible will not be found by scrutinizing incidental features of the text; but by considering the passages containing basic theological and moral teaching. This is not to argue for a canon within a canon, but simply to recognize that the central core of biblical teaching has to be separated from the peripheral aspects, just as we separate the essential message of a parable from the incidental features which are part of the overall picture. In many cases, too, the same

¹⁰ See the two articles by V.S. Poythress, 'Analysing a Biblical Text: Some Important Linguistic Distinctions', *SJT* 32, 2 (1979), 113–137; 'Analysing a Biblical Text: What are We After?' *SJT* 32, 4 (1979), 319–331.

¹¹ The term 'Homogenous' is used by R.E. Brown in his valuable discussion on 'Hermeneutics' in the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, pp. 617ff. to describe the fact that the fuller meaning must be an extension of the literal meaning which the author wished to convey.

teaching is repeated in more than one biblical context such as the New Testament epistles which enables us to be sure that we are dealing with a didactic passage. Continuing Christian practice is drawn from the imperatives of Scripture, not its descriptive content.

5. Often when teaching is given in the Scriptures, appeal is made to a recognized permanent factor as the basis for a particular practice. Thus there is the appeal to creation ordinances, for example, drawing attention to features of human life which were ordained by God at the very beginning of human history, and which come to man as man. Of all biblical features, they are the transcultural principles *par excellence*. The dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees about divorce provides a very clear example of the application of the principle. When the question is raised with Jesus he does not become involved with the contemporary discussions on the matter but focuses on the creation mandate in [Genesis 2:24](#). 'Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother" . . . Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate' ([Matt. 19:4-6](#)). A different type of example would be the principle of the priesthood of all believers, which is based on the fact that our great High Priest has 'passed through the heaven'. Not only can all believers have confidence in coming to the throne of grace ([Heb. 4:14-16](#)), but as Jesus is a priest forever ([Heb. 7:21, 24](#)) it also holds true that all who are saved draw near to God through him (v. [25](#)).

IV. APPLICATIONS AND CONTROLS

When we come to follow out any system of guidelines we still have to exercise great care in our selection of the areas of biblical teaching which we regard as amenable to contextualisation, and in the manner in which we apply the guidelines. When biblical teaching is considered then, there appear to be four main categories of material to which contextualisation could apply.¹² These are:

1. The core: the essential message of sin and grace, with emphasis on the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.
2. The substance: the Old Testament explanations of the demands of God and the associated principles of worship and practice, together with the gospel tradition as it has been passed on by the apostolic band.
3. The application: exhortations which were addressed to particular local settings of the people of God.
4. The expression: the manner of life of the believing community as it relates to a particular cultural setting. This may involve the application of general Christian principles to specific situations which have no direct counterpart in the biblical text.

The degree of contextualisation will vary in relation to each of these categories. There will be the least amount of contextualisation in the first two, and the greatest in the fourth. From culture to culture, the core and substance of the faith have to remain constant, allowing only for some linguistic change in order to communicate effectively the message. In regard to application there will be no contextualisation when the New Testament suggests that a command has as its foundation a universally applicable basis. On the other hand, certain matters of social custom will be contextualised, so that the message is related meaningfully to a particular cultural environment.

¹² These categories have been drawn from the helpful discussion by N.R. Ericson, 'Implications from the New Testament for Contextualisation', *Theology and Mission: Papers Given at Trinity Consultation* No. 1 ed. D.J. Hesslegrave (Baker, 1978), pp. 83.

The New Testament points to certain controls which hem us in, and which should prevent us from lapsing into extreme individualism in our interpretation of the biblical message. Paul made his appeal to the commandments of the Lord ([I Cor. 7:10](#)). The teaching of the canonical Gospels provides for us those commandments, along with the epistolary expansion of them by men on whose minds the spirit of God had worked ([In. 16:12-15](#)). There is also recourse to the collective body of believers, drawing upon the formulation of biblical teaching by past generations of Christians and those by contemporary believers. Past teaching provides a framework from which to make further developments, while the pursuit of the task along with the total church community provides a safeguard against excessive individualism. Finally, of course, there is the corrective activity of the Word of God itself ([Heb. 2:12, 13](#)). The Word of God is active and discerning, and we stand daily before as it comes to judge and to correct. That Word must not only be our source of knowledge but also be our teacher and corrector.

Whatever guidelines are adopted we are going to be left with cases in which there is uncertainty. On some issues we are going to have to admit that we do not know at this stage of the history of interpretation if the reference is to a principle or a custom. Clearly we do not want to elevate a human custom into a divine command. It would be better to lean the other way and consider a possible custom to be a matter of principle and so be overscrupulous in our obedience to our Lord, while reserving final judgement on the exact nature of the case before us.

The hermeneutical task is daunting and demanding, but two great principles stemming from the Reformation tradition of biblical interpretation give encouragement. The first of these is that of the Analogy of Faith. The Scripture is a unified whole, and in interpretation we need to compare Scripture with Scripture. The second principle really underlies the concept of the Analogy of Faith. It is that of the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture. The biblical message is clear enough for ordinary people to understand, with obscure finding their explanation in another part. 'Perspicuity' is an epithet to the totality of Scripture, not its individual parts. It also relates to the basic message of the Bible, and it is not a description concerning the difficulty of the exegetical task. Exegetical difficulties and problems in applying the results to contemporary church life should not distract us from receiving and responding to the central message of Scripture.¹³

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Christ and Culture

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¹³ On these two aspects of Scripture see R.C. Sproul 'Biblical Interpretation and the Analogy of Faith', *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, ed. Roger R. Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels (Baker, 1980), pp. 119-135; S.B. Ferguson, 'The Book for All the People', *Christian Graduate*, (June 1982), pp. 17-20.

In a wide and comprehensive sweep of salvation history, the author focuses on the role of culture in God's redemptive plan. He critiques Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* and discusses the relationship of the kingdom of God to the principalities and powers. He notes that evangelicals have been slow to relate the gospel to culture.
Editor

Keywords: Culture, Gnosticism, anti-culturism, church, creation, fall, stewardship, cultural mandate, redemption, kingdom of God, principalities and powers, freedom

Since earliest times Christians have been concerned with culture.¹ God placed humanity in a cultural context at the beginning of human events when he gave to our first parents a 'cultural mandate' ([Gen. 2:26-28](#)). Culture has been and remains therefore integral to human experience.

Our focus in this essay will be on Christ and culture. We would therefore begin by defining 1) worldview; 2) culture; and 3) religion. The central question is: How are Christ and culture related in the life of the Christian and the church at large?

WORLDVIEW AND PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy has generally been understood to be a comprehensive theoretical account of the basic issues that concern humanity. It is a general science. It deals with the nature of human knowledge (epistemology), with the nature of reality (ontology) and with the norms that impact on human life and the values that people cherish (axiology).

Philosophy also often designates what may be called a worldview, which is best understood to be *pre*-theoretical; it leads to philosophy. A worldview includes the origin, nature and destiny of the human race. It takes account not only of the philosophical stance but also of the religious position. It connects the religious position and the philosophy that is built on that position.

Religion may best be described as the human response to God's revelation. It includes but is not limited to worship. It is in its broadest sense service either to God or to a substitute for God.

Culture

To ascertain the meaning of culture, we begin with the history of the word. 'Culture' is derived from the Latin *colere* which meant originally the act of cultivating and the fruit of working the soil. Later it included the production, development and improvement of plants and animals. In modern times it has taken on a special meaning namely the growing of bacteria or micro-organisms in a specially prepared nourishing substance.

Culture is the development, improvement, refinement of the non-human creation. It *gives form to existing material*. In an extended sense it may mean the refinement of personal aptitudes and gifts. When used in that way we can speak of a cultured person who, for example, has developed her vocal capabilities to a high degree of perfection. She

¹ In recent decades evangelical scholars, in particular those who are engaged in the study and practice of transcultural mission, have subjected the idea of culture to intense scrutiny. Their attention has been on the 'contextualization' of the gospel, on the various ways, for good and for ill, culture has affected the content and the medium of the message. The study missiologists undertake covers the impact of culture on the formation of the gospel message in the early decades of our era, on the particular (usually western) culture of the transmitters of the gospel and the culture of the receptors of the gospel message.

has a 'cultured' voice. The same may be said of a painter who has developed a keen artistic sense.²

In this essay 'culture' will mean the forming, shaping, refining activity that produces the ideas, customs, skills, artifacts and arts of a given people in a given period. Taken together, the cultural acts and the products of those acts constitute human civilization.

Culture is a communal task. No one person alone produces a culture. Nor is it the product of one generation only but combines the work of past and present generations.

THE CHURCH LOOKS AT CULTURE

Before considering what the Scriptures tell us regarding culture, we shall look at a number of ways in which the Christian church has considered this relationship. For this we make grateful use of the book by H.Richard Niebuhr.³

1. 'Christ is Against Culture'

In the early post-apostolic church the people of God had on the one hand come into possession of a profound collection of writings, namely the NT canon, much of which the early church did not fully grasp. On the other hand they experienced oppression as a minority in a totalitarian empire with its impressive culture, its empire worship and its pervasive polytheism. Their ranks were not filled with the rich and noble but with the poor and the despised. Many were slaves with little or no available free time.

Four books, in addition to the NT writings that circulated at the time were *The Teaching of the Twelve*, *the Shepherd of Hermes*, *the Epistle of Barnabas* and *The First Epistle of Clement*. They presented Christianity as a way of life separate from contemporary culture. There was scarcely time to think about culture, much less to engage in it. Christians often thought of themselves as a new race, distinct from Jews and gentiles. Many Christians refused to enter military service. Their expectation was for a speedy return of Christ.

One of the most explicit representatives of the view that culture and Christ are incompatible was Tertullian of Northern Africa (165–216). For him culture is inherently sinful. A servant of God should not be engaged in commerce. The philosophers of Greece had nothing in common with the 'disciples of heaven'. Jerusalem and Athens had nothing in common.

The early advocates of Christ against culture promoted monasticism to protect themselves against the evils of the world. Later, advocates would as far as possible flee from the world. Yet, contrary to what one might expect, the monasteries, their places of

² In the course of history, one that continues to the present, culture has taken on an unfortunately truncated meaning. It is not what people do with nature as they follow their life's calling in their work, whether it is husbandry or homemaking or industry, or exercising an artistic aptitude; it is what they do when the day's work is done. Culture is then the refinement of human life which the more affluent and well educated can enjoy when they contemplate the fine arts and relish the taste of the beautiful things in life. In this view only the people who do not have to work for a living can become cultured, and then only if in their leisure time they apply themselves to life's finer activities. Unfortunately this elitist meaning enjoys wide currency, with the result that culture is often not closely related to one's work nor to education.

³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (Harper, 1951). He distinguishes five different approaches in the Christian church to culture. We have also consulted the book of the Reformed Ecumenical Council on *Facing the Challenge of Secularism* (1991). A recent book that requires attention is Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Eerdmans, 1994). Another is the work of Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh, *Truth is not What it Used to Be* (InterVarsity Press, 1996).

refuge, became the preservers of culture at a time when wide-spread chaos reigned in Europe.

Among the representatives of this view in later time we would mention the great Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910). Deeply impressed with the meaninglessness of life and the tawdriness of the values of the society in which he lived, he militated, as in *The Death of Ivan Illich*, against culture.⁴ The evil with which people contend, he said, is to be found in society, not in the individual. There is no such thing as good government, and the churches have become self-centred organizations that are far removed from the Christianity of Jesus. He left his family of wife and nine children, sold his extensive property and sought to live a very simple, self-sufficient life, close to nature. Niebuhr calls him a ‘crusader against culture’ (Niebuhr p. 60).

2. ‘The Christ of Culture’

If the advocates of Christ against culture posited their antithesis, the promoters of the Christ of culture accommodated Christ to culture. The former view stressed the difference; the latter the similarity. This second approach is as old as the former one, going back to the Gnostics of St John’s day.

The Gnostics (Basilides, Valentinus) sought, in the words of Niebuhr, to understand the transcendent realm as continuous with the present life (p. 84). They offered an esoteric knowledge (Greek: *gnosis*) to which only the initiated could attain, a mystical knowledge which enabled one to escape from the world and from the body. Redemption was limited to people with esoteric knowledge which was passed on from teacher to follower. Christ was for them above all the great teacher.

F.C. Burkitt⁵ describes the work of the Gnostics as an attempt to reconcile the gospel to the science and philosophy of their time. Among the ideas then prevalent was the thought that the soul is the prisoner of the body. Redemption is for the soul, from the body. It was apparently against their teaching, namely that true knowledge was reserved for the enlightened few who really ‘know’, that John in his first letter told the believers that they all had an anointing of the Holy One and that they all knew the truth ([1 Jn. 2:20](#)).

The influence of Gnosticism through the ages upon the church has led to the depreciation of the body and to the depiction of Christ as the teacher rather than the sacrifice. In the 12th century Abelard presented Christ as the great teacher who excelled in doing better than Plato and Aristotle had done before him. Of the philosophers Abelard said that ‘in their care for the state and their citizens . . . in life and doctrine, they give evidence of an evangelical and apostolic perfection and come little short of the Christian religion. They are, in fact, joined to us by this common zeal for moral achievement.’⁶

In more recent time John Locke expressed the view that Christ is a piece with (Western) culture in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. In similar vein Thomas Jefferson saw in Christ the one who directs people to attain an ever greater height of culture. He also rewrote the gospels, eliminating from them all the miracles.

Albert Ritschl (1882–1889) proposed a reconciliation of Christ and civilization by means of the idea of the kingdom of God. For him the church is the true form of the ethical community in which members of different nations are bound together in mutual love for the sake of achieving that universal kingdom. Christ is our example. To be true to him, one should engage in civic work for the sake of the common good in faithfulness to one’s social

⁴ Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Illich*.

⁵ F.C. Burkitt, *Church and Gnosis* (1932).

⁶ J.R. McCallum, *Abelard’s Christian Theology* (1948), p. 90.

calling. The kingdom of God was for him the synthesis of the great values esteemed by democratic culture: the freedom and intrinsic worth of individuals, social cooperation and universal peace (Niebuhr p. 99). After he had selected from culture those elements which were most compatible with Christ, he interpreted Christ through culture. His may be called a 'culture-protestantism'.

In this view of the Christ of culture the distinctiveness of the gospel was lost. It easily drifted into a kind of humanism.

3. 'Christ above Culture'

Both the radical anti-culturalists and the cultural accommodationists remained until the 19th century somewhat on the periphery of the church. The 'church of the centre' has sought by means of a synthesis of Christ and culture to demonstrate that Christ is the fulfilment of the best of human achievement. As the subtitle, 'Christ above culture' suggests, this view posits in reality higher and lower areas. The church is higher than the rest of society; faith is higher than reason; church teaching is exalted over reason's wisdom; the sacred is higher than the secular. But both levels are joined, in this view, in the plan of God.

This trend, like that of the first two, goes back to the beginning of the Christian era. Mention should be made in this connection of Clement of Alexandria (died c. 216) and Basil of Cappodocia (c. 329–379). Attention should also be given to the theology of Thomas of Aquinas (1275–1274) and the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

Clement taught both a Stoic detachment from things and the higher morality of not becoming engrossed in the things of the world. *The Instructor* corresponds closely to the injunctions of the Stoic handbooks current at the time. A Christian should be a good person in accordance with the standard of good culture. But there is a higher level to which Christ calls his followers. It is a life of love of God for its own sake, a life of spontaneous goodness in which neighbours are served in response to divine love. Christ is thus not against culture but uses its best products as instruments in giving to people what they cannot attain by their own efforts. Faith must supplement reason and take it to new heights.

Clement lived at a time when the followers of the way were still a persecuted minority. Basil of Cappodocia, who lived a full century later, gave guidance when Christianity had passed from being the faith of a persecuted minority to being the official religion of the Roman Empire. For Basil the best of Greek culture provided a preparation for the gospel. For as the Jews had the law, the Greeks had philosophy to prepare them to know God truly. This position allowed for a higher evaluation of pagan culture, as the basis for a discriminating use of pagan authors in Christian teaching.

Thomas of Aquinas wrote in the thirteenth century when the church had become the custodian of European culture. As a monk Thomas remained faithful to his vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. His view was that it is from his superior position that Christ should be brought into harmonious relationship to culture.

Thomas took from Aristotle the idea of the superiority of the contemplative life. But contemplation for Thomas had for its object the Triune God, not the unmoved mover of Aristotle, the thought thinking itself. God for Aristotle was a human construct. For Aquinas the highest goal of humankind was the unblurred vision of God. The monastic life was for him not so much a protest against worldliness as the effort to attain to the deep vision of unchanging reality.

Thomas found the rules for social life, not in the gospels but in human reason. In their broad principles they constitute a natural law which is based ultimately on the eternal will of the mind of God and which all people of good will can discern through the proper

use of reason. For him, Niebuhr says, culture is the work of God-given reason in God-given nature (p. 135).

The synthesis of Christ and culture in the Thomist view should be maintained and monitored in society by the church as an institution, in this instance, the church under the Bishop of Rome. In the God-required order of things there is a hierarchy of rule, with the church occupying the highest level. This is often called subsidiarity. Thomas expressed it thus: 'The King and Lord of the heavens ordained from all eternity this law: that the gifts of his providence should reach to the lowest things by way of those that lie between'⁷. (quoted by Gerald Vann in *St Thomas Aquinas* p. 45).

The synthesis was carried further by Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903) in his social encyclicals. In 'Christ our Redeemer' Leo wrote that Christ conferred on the church 'all effectual aids for human salvation, he ordained with the utmost emphasis . . . that men should be subject to her as to himself and zealously follow her guidance in every department of life'. The church was now officially proclaimed the guardian of culture.

'Christ and Culture in Paradox'

The advocates of the Christ of culture emphasize the importance of the kingdom of God that comprises human culture as well as the benefits of Christ. Martin Luther (1483–1546), taking another approach, advanced the idea of two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, where culture is pursued.

In his pamphlet *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants* Luther wrote: 'There are two kingdoms, one the kingdom of God, the other the kingdom of the world. . . . God's kingdom is a kingdom of grace and mercy . . . but the kingdom of the world is a kingdom of wrath and severity. . . . Now he who would confuse these two kingdoms—as our false fanatics do . . . would put God's kingdom and mercy into the world's kingdom; and that is the same as putting the devil in heaven and God in hell.'⁸

These two kingdoms, while they may be distinguished, may not be separated, for Christ, said Luther, is lord of both. Culture, no less than Christian piety, is the area in which Christ must be followed. But the rules which apply in culture must be set free from the church (contra Leo XIII). Christ has given us the freedom to do faithfully what culture requires. Luther spoke in paradoxical terms. God uses wrathful means to accomplish his mercy. And even as God does such strange works, so too the Christian.

In all the approaches to culture sketched thus far, one can detect a common overarching view of life, namely that of two areas commonly called nature and grace (sacred and secular). The differences that exist pertain to the primacy given to one or the other and how these areas are further interrelated.

The Christ against culture gives such primacy to grace that the world and its culture almost fade from view. Culture should be avoided as much as possible. The Christ of culture places such a premium on nature (the realm of culture) that grace is largely absorbed into it.

The Christ above culture makes a definite choice of the primacy of grace and of the favoured position of the church in society. This view is like the two storeys of a structure, neither of which can exist without the other. While culture is good, Christ is better.

The Christ and culture in paradox approach agrees with the Christ above culture in positing the two realms (now called kingdoms) and in attributing primacy to the realm of grace. Christ rules both in wrath and grace.

⁷ Quoted by Gerald Vann, *St Thomas Aquinas*, p. 45.

⁸ Martin Luther, *Works, Vol IV* pp. 265,66).

As we now turn to the next approach as to how Christ and culture are related, we encounter one that breaks in principle with the two-realm, two-tier mould and replaces it with a holistic perspective based on the universal lordship of Christ.

'Christ Transforms Culture'

The view that Christ transforms culture stresses the goodness of the creation that God made. In recognizing the basic distinction between the Creator and the creation, it maintains that the 'sacred' and the 'secular' are not separate realms. For the rule of Christ is over all and, since he has reconciled the world to God, all areas of life are under his sovereignty. The common life should not be negated or depreciated but seen as a holy calling from God. Soul is not higher than body for both body and soul form one integrated whole. Church, state and cultural agencies should be partners in obedience to Christ. The one is not subordinate to the other; they should function as coordinates in their service of Christ.

In the fifth century St Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354–430), stressed that Christ is the converter of culture. But this is possible, he said, only because the creation was 'very good'. Evil is not an independent force and cannot exist on its own, but only from feeding on the good.

Augustine sought to give an appraisal of universal history in *The City of God*.⁹ History, said the Bishop of Hippo, provides the stage for an ongoing struggle between the kingdom of God and that of darkness. But the struggle is not between matter and spirit, but rather between opposing spirits active through all human experience.

Throughout the centuries the churchman who perhaps most clearly advocated Christ as the transformer of culture was John Calvin (1509–1564). Following Augustine, he emphasized the goodness of creation and held together its themes of fall and redemption in Christ. More than any other reformer he forced people to think about the social dimensions of the gospel. More than others he stressed the calling of the people of God, regardless of what work they did.

As one can learn from the history of the church, there are many attitudes among Christians to culture. We have seen how one or other of the approaches sketched above has emphasized this or that biblical theme. Those who place Christ and culture in opposition stress the need to distinguish between what Christ commands and what the society of human beings offer. They can appeal to passages that state that the whole world lies in the control of evil and those passages that warn against loving the world.

The advocates of the Christ of culture assume that there is still much that is good in human society. They appeal to passages that promise that the meek will inherit the earth, that the treasures of the kingdoms of the world will be brought into the New Jerusalem ([Rev. 21:26](#)).

The synthesizers, even when they speak of all people of good will and affirm the importance of human reason, place the greater emphasis on the power of grace. They reject the secularists who put the living of the here and now above all else.

The advocates of the paradox have seen that the kingdom of God is directly involved. They sense that at one and the same time we are justified and remain sinners, that although Christ does some works 'with his left hand', he is active in society.

Those who believe in the transformation of culture have built on the abiding gracious power of God for life in the world today. But they have no enviable track record to show where they, in following the teaching of Christ, have extensively transformed culture.

⁹ St Augustine, *The City of God three volumes* (Catholic University of America Press, 1951).

THE BIBLICAL IDEA OF CULTURE

Evangelical Christians have recognized the need to shape and refine the personal life to make it conform to the gospel. Honesty, integrity, chastity and family values are all high on their list of priorities. The same cannot be said of their concern to make the social structures of society conform to Christian norms. Here their track record has been poor. Moreover, there has been a long standing and deep difference of opinion both among evangelicals and in the church at large concerning the legitimacy of engaging with contemporary culture.

Mark Noll in a recent book¹⁰ complains that evangelicals have fallen far short in their calling to relate the gospel to culture. Their record constitutes a scandal.

We shall have to proceed in our analysis with humility and modesty. It is not easy to grasp the full teaching of the Scriptures. Time and again people have stressed one theme to the neglect of others. We shall have to make a concerted effort to take in the full sweep of biblical teaching, neglecting no part of it. The pitfalls, as we may learn from the history of the church, are many. How can we both appreciate the value and avoid the pitfalls?

We shall seek to explain culture in terms of the central story line of the Bible, that is, creation, fall, redemption and consummation—all bound up in the Triune God's plan in Jesus Christ.

In doing this we shall tackle three difficult issues: 1) the different usages in the Bible of the term 'world' and the apparently contradictory prescribed attitudes toward it; 2) the role of the principalities and powers, the evil rulers of the present age; and 3) the significance for culture of the biblical idea of the kingdom of God.

It will be apparent that the biblical idea of culture as described above is as broad as life itself. Even as culture should not be limited to privileged people, so it may not be seen to exclude science and learning. Since science actually plays a dominant role in our modern culture it cannot be left out of the purview.

A Starting Point

A passage in Paul's letter to the church in Colosse is very important for a true understanding of Christ and culture:

He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross ([1:15-20](#) NIV).

Christ, says Paul, is the Creator, the Sustainer and the Reconciler. In the creation, through the cross and by the resurrection he has the supremacy. Nothing is excluded from his creative, sustaining and reconciling work. Even the principalities and powers are subject to him. What is more amazing, he has reconciled these powers to God!

The Creation

The creation made by God through Christ, the Word of God, as the Genesis story tells, was thoroughly good. There was no inherent evil in nature. A definite order of dependence

¹⁰ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Eerdmans, 1994).

and responsibility in the creation was established, as indicated in the creatures that were formed on each of the successive days. Before finishing his creative work God made the first human parents and, viewing them against the background of all that he had created, pronounced all very good. As he contemplated it all he enjoyed his sabbath.

The masterpiece of God's work was humanity, male and female, made like God, made in God's image, made to be workers. The task of our first parents was to guard and till the garden which was their home. They might carry on where God left off. They would take what God had made and expand its order, as when Adam named the animals, and they would in general seek to develop the creation to its full potential.

God made man a steward, one who would work under God as his representative, placed over the entire creation. All man's work was to be done in obedience to God. The task of humankind in God's world is expressed in [Genesis 1:26-28](#): 'Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.' This may be called our continuing life assignment. There is a reflection on this passage in [Psalm 115:14](#): The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to man.

The place of man in the creation is well expressed in [Psalm 8:5-8](#):

You have made [humankind] a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned them with glory and honour. You have made them ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

Culture began with the mandate of humankind's original life assignment. In God's design for the creation and for humankind, he indicated that the mandate, the only law that was given, was also good. It would actually be the test of all future good or evil.

In Paradise there was as yet no culture. But the workers were ready to start. All the material that was needed was at hand. There was no disruption in the creation, no question as to who was in charge and no resistance in nature to man's formative work. There was no curse, only the gracious injunction to begin cultural activity. In the beginning God turned humanity toward the world.

In making its strong affirmation about the goodness of creation, the Bible resolutely sets itself against any thought that evil resides in the creation itself, or that there is an eternal struggle between a good God and an evil universe, or that an eternal conflict rages between good and evil within the world. The creation story also excludes the idea that the material world is eternal.

The goodness of creation is reflected in the word of the apostle Paul when he tells Timothy that all God's gifts are good and are to be received with thanksgiving ([1 Tim. 4:4](#)). It was at this stage unthinkable that people would give too much attention to the world. They could continue the work God had commissioned. At that stage giving full attention to the world was simple obedience.

The Extent of the Fall

To understand the place of culture in the life of people, it is necessary to see it not only in the light of the original creation but also against the backdrop of man's fall into sin.

The fall into sin had a threefold effect: 1) it alienated God from his image bearers and them from their God, as was apparent from the fear of God that developed in Adam and Eve after they sinned and the strong displeasure of God in his creatures; 2) it resulted in a mutual alienation between husband and wife, as was apparent in their effort to shift the blame; and 3) it brought opposition between our first parents and the world that they were told to govern in God's name. From then on the ground would work against them.

We shall limit ourselves at this point to the effects of sin upon man's relationship to the world. The first was a resistance and even a rebellion of the non-human creation against man. The fields would bring forth thorns and thistles and man's work would become a drudgery, a painful, frustrating exercise. As Paul says in his letter to the Romans, the creation groans inwardly, waiting for the adoption of the sons of God ([Rom. 8](#)). Only when the caretaker is redeemed will the creation once again be free.

A second effect of the revolt of humankind against God was a sinful worldliness, that is, a seeking to use and control the world, not as God's stewards to promote their own welfare in obedience to him, but as unfaithful servants who seek to reap the benefits of the world for themselves without regard for God. This was what the builders of the City of Babel had in mind.

The City of Babel

In outlining a biblical view of culture, insufficient attention has been given to the story of Babel in [Genesis 11](#). In this story three features related to culture stand out. The first is the mention of the cities of the line of Cain. He was the first to build a city ([Gen. 4:17](#)). In the line of Cain, Nimrod built Babylon, Erech, Akkad, Calneh, Ninevah, Rehoboth, Calah and Resen ([Gen. 10:10-12](#)). The city, the centre of culture, became the symbol of the combined power of the 'sons of men'. The early city culture culminated in the building of Babel.

The building of Babel was a response which was in direct opposition to the cultural mandate. What was intended to be an assignment to the glory of God became an undertaking to the glory of humankind.

The Babel goal was a unified world culture, one which would reach to heaven, but would have no place for the God of heaven. The narrative states that when God looked down and saw the consequences of the city's completion, namely a world in which humans would be supreme, a truly evil empire, he decided to intervene.

In this story God exposed the myth of humanist world culture. It shows how deeply God is concerned with culture, in this instance with culture of the wrong kind.

One has to keep Babel in mind as one follows the history of redemption narrated in the Scriptures. Until the time of the Incarnation the city was either the bulwark of evil power, or the place where God dwelled, or a mixture of conflicting spirits. Sodom became the symbol of corruption; Zion was the Old Testament city of God; other cities were made into havens of refuge. Abraham chose a tent for a dwelling rather than a city.

A new beginning in the fullness of time was signalled at Pentecost, where Babel's confusion of tongues was undone by the Spirit of Christ. The gospel broke all language barriers. A new international community of people of God was formed in the New Testament church.

But the Spirit did not at that time direct the disciples of Jesus to build a new city of Zion for saints only. Rather, he sent them out into the world to gather together the people of God in one holy catholic and apostolic church.

Only at the end, when the history of redemption is complete, will there be a city exclusively for God's people. Then the city of Abraham's dream, whose architect and builder is God, will appear out of heaven. Only the redeemed will enter. Finally culture, in its fullness, in its societal systems and in its personal endeavours, will exist to the glory of God and the welfare and joy of humankind. In the meanwhile we live in the world as it is.

To some the world appears to be, at least in part, divine, taking the place of God. It would appear that [Genesis 1-3](#) was written to counteract this view. Habakkuk speaks of a fisherman who believed that his net was a god and so presented an offering to it when the net was full: 'The wicked foe pulls all of the [fish] up with hooks, he catches them in

his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet, and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food' ([Hab. 1:16](#)). The Babylonian myths attributed divinity to parts of the world; Greek stories of creation, such as Hesiod gives in the *Theogony*, likewise regarded the heavens and the earth and its component parts as divine.

In rejecting the widespread position that the world is in any sense divine, the opening chapters of Genesis make clear that God is the sovereign Creator, and the world is only world.

Sometimes the world is seen as embracing the entirety of existent beings and things. Such a view blots God out of man's mind ([Ps. 14:1](#)). In both instances the world in effect supplants God. This attitude of a self-styled mastery over the world the Bible calls the 'viewpoint of the world' ([1 Jn. 4:5](#)). It is this kind of worldliness that the Bible warns against when it tells us not to love the world for whoever is a friend of the world is an enemy of God ([Ja. 4:4](#)). This is what is at stake in the idea of secularism.

One thing is clear: even in its fallen state humanity still occupied an exalted place. Man who was made a little lower than the angels, has been crowned with glory and honour and God has placed all things under his feet ([Ps. 8](#)).

THE REDEMPTION OF CULTURE

After the fall, God continues to uphold this world. Having made it, not a wasteland but a habitat for humanity ([Isa. 45:18](#)), he preserves the law and order that make it possible for people to live and enjoy a measure of well being and prosperity.

The Faithfulness of God

The faithfulness of God to the world is expressed in a graphic way in the establishment of the covenant with Noah. In the account of the flood God promises, 'Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth' ([Gen. 9:11](#)). When God sees the rainbow in the clouds he will remember ([9:17](#)).¹¹

Jeremiah builds upon God's covenant with the creation when God promised to Israel the new covenant with humankind that would come in the new age of the Messiah. 'If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time, then my covenant with David my servant can be broken' ([Jer. 33:20, 21](#)).

Hosea joins God's promise of restoration to apostate Israel with the promise that he will restore the good relation between the world and himself and between the world and his people:

I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord. In that day I will respond, declares the Lord. I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth; and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'not my loved one'. I will say to those called 'not my people', 'You are my people' and they will say 'You are my God' ([Hos. 2:20-23](#)).

Peter builds upon the faithfulness of God to the creation when he promises a new heaven and a new earth, one that will be purified by fire and in which justice will be the order of the day ([2 Pet. 3:10, 13](#)).

¹¹ The bow was a weapon. If God were to break the covenant he would direct the arrows against himself.

Christ Restores us for Culture

As soon as man sinned, God went back to work, this time the work of redemption. There are glimmerings of this new work of God already in the Genesis story. God forthwith set out to re-establish the kingdom that had been invaded and overrun by the prince of the world. Adam and Eve received words of hope; the devil, the forecast of his destruction.

The work of redemption may rightly be called the restoration of humankind to its rightful place of work, work that culminates in rest. It is instructive to note that [Hebrews 2](#) quotes from [Psalm 8](#) which speaks of the place of humankind in the world. After speaking of the lofty position of man in the creation, that all things have been placed under man's feet, it adds: 'but we do not yet see all things placed under his feet, but we see Jesus, crowned with glory and honour'. Although Joshua did not give rest, Jesus gives rest to his people. Here was the promise that they could again be the imagers of God in culture.

Redemption means not only a change in the worker, but also in the material with which he/she is to work. This, however, is a restoration which will be completed only in the future. The groaning creation, the world that was subjected to vanity because man failed in his stewardship, will one day be restored to its full harmony. Even now it is waiting for the adoption of the sons of God ([Rom. 8](#)). Even in the state of sin and grace God acknowledges that nature is man's workshop and that its restoration to complete perfection will follow the restoration of humanity to the glorious state of God's redeemed people.

Redemption, it should be abundantly clear, is not a freedom from work but a freedom in work. It is also the enjoyment of accomplishment which is essential to rest. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them ([Eph. 2:10](#)). This sense of accomplishment is confirmed by the words of the seer in Revelation: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for their works follow them' ([Rev. 14:13](#)).

In establishing more firmly the relationship between creation and redemption which has been disturbed by the cosmic fall, we note four interrelated biblical ideas: 1) Christ is the second or last Adam; 2) Christ has updated the cultural mandate; 3) Christ has re-established the kingdom of God; 4) Christ has sent his people into society where there is a conflict of kingdoms and of cultures to proclaim redemption.

Christ is the Last (Second) Adam

In his profound insight into redemption's plan, the apostle Paul called Jesus Christ the last Adam ([1 Cor. 15:45](#)). This means that Christ not only took the place of sinners in order to redeem us, but he also took the place of our first parents to restore us as stewards of the creation.

Developing this thought, we note that Christ assumed the office that was given to humankind. Even as all things had been placed under the feet of humankind, so Christ has all things placed under him.

There is however this difference between Christ and Adam, namely that Adam was only the human steward. Christ is both the human steward and the Divine Lord. All authority has been given to him in heaven and on earth. As the second Adam, he is also the new Lawgiver. He makes this clear in what is commonly called the Great Commission, which should not be viewed apart from the cultural mandate. When he tells his disciples that they must teach all that he, the sovereign Lord, has commanded he assumes the role of the Restorer to office and the ruler of all. The closing words of Matthew's gospel should be seen as an updating and contextualizing of the words originally spoken to humankind at the beginning. This commission takes into account the redemption from sin that is

accorded to humans through Jesus Christ. Because Christ fulfilled his work which was to destroy the works of the devil, who turned meaningful work into meaningless drudgery, the disciples may go forth with the assurance that their Redeemer is Lord of all.

CHRIST AND THE KINGDOMS

Not only has there been historical progress in the flow of human events but also in the life and work of Christ the Restorer of culture. This brings us to the teaching of the kingdom of God.

The Bible which shows the way of redemption may also be called the Book of the Kingdom. The basic truth behind the teaching of the kingdom is that God rules over the creation. Jesus began his ministry by urgently calling people to repentance in view of the coming kingdom. Jesus' teaching on the gospel of the kingdom includes his many parables of the kingdom; the gospels tell about miracles which indicated that he reestablished the kingdom. During the last forty days on earth before his ascension Jesus again spoke to his disciples about the kingdom ([Acts 1:3](#)). Luke begins and ends the book of Acts with reference to the kingdom of God.

The Conflict of Kingdoms

We cannot speak of the kingdom of God unless we see it in the context of a great struggle throughout the whole of human history. Likewise, we cannot rightly understand humankind's cultural task except against the background of the cosmic power play that began in Paradise and which has continued to the present. In other words, there is a conflict of kingdoms that has been waged since Satan fell and began to oppose God. That conflict of kingdoms came to include people when Satan won over our first parents from the service of God to his servitude.

Near the end of his earthly ministry Jesus said that the Prince of the world would then and there be driven out and that he, Jesus, would draw all people to him ([Jn. 12:32](#)). Paul began his letter to the Romans by declaring that Jesus was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead ([1:4](#)).

It was necessary for Jesus not only to dethrone the Usurper but also to win back the citizens of the kingdom, delivering them from the servitude of the evil one and restoring them to his service. This too is a part of the coming of the kingdom. Paul expressed it succinctly when he wrote to the Colossians that God has rescued (Greek: metastasized) us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins ([1:13](#)). In another passage Paul states that Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the living and the dead ([Rom. 14:9](#)).

The Scope of the Kingdom

There was never a time when the outcome of the conflict of kingdoms was in doubt. The opening chapters of the book of Job make clear that the Usurper can do only what God allows, but what God allows him to do is not insignificant.

The kingdom entails more than forced submission. It also means winning back the love and loyalty of the citizens who had been lured away from God. This happens when God's law is written on the heart and the Spirit makes us ready and able to obey it. To those who are reconciled to God and seek to do his will comes the promise that it is God's good pleasure to give them the kingdom ([Luk. 12:32](#)).

Christ Sent His Disciples into the World

As we noted earlier, there is a certain unity between different cultures. At the same time the directions that culture takes can be and often are diametrically opposed.

We should therefore distinguish between the structures of created reality, within which our cultural activity must be performed, the direction which this activity takes place and the situation in which it is performed.

The *structures* were given with the creation. They include the stewardship relation of humankind to the cosmos, the abiding order in the creation, the world as the common cultural workshop and cultural activity as humankind's service.

These structures hold for each and every age and for each and every place. (We are not thinking of the many different societal systems and institutions which have been built up in the course of history but of the basic framework, the Word that is forever settled in the heavens, to which the human constructs are a response). There is a dynamic creation order that sustains us in being through Jesus Christ ([Col. 1:17](#)).

The functioning of humankind in these structures reveals a difference in *direction*. God structured created reality in such a way that there would be a difference according to whether his Word of command would be followed or disobeyed. Direction indicates how people respond to the common structures of God's command and to the order he has maintained in the world. Here is the great difference among people, between those who serve God and those who do not serve ([Mal. 3:18](#)).

The World of Western Culture

Western culture, which has largely dominated the culture of the world, is a whole way of organizing human life that rests on and validates ideas that can be traced in very large part to either the gospel or the Enlightenment. The central citadel of our culture, says Lesslie Newbigin¹² is the belief in the immense achievements of the scientific method. Behind this faith is the conviction that the final court of appeal lies in the human consciousness. Friedrich Schleiermacher, says Newbigin, expressed it clearly: 'We must declare the description of the human states of mind to be the fundamental dogmatic form, while propositions about the second and third forms, (i.e., about the attributes and the acts of God or the constitution of the world) are permissible only in so far as they can be developed out of propositions of the first form' (Newbigin p. 44). Paganized western culture poses a more formidable mission field to the Christian missionary than does the non-western culture.

One of the most pervasive and influential oppositions to Christianity affecting our situation comes from the Enlightenment. Here we have nothing less than worlds in conflict in modern dress.

Worlds in Conflict

The conflict of kingdoms of which the Bible speaks finds expression in the world, the cultural arena. This conflict is reflected already in the way the Bible speaks about the world, to which we referred earlier. In one passage we are told that God loved the world so much that he sacrificed his Son to save it. In another passage we read that he considers it his enemy. The seeming contradiction should be understood in the light of differing responses to God's revelation, the conflicting forces in the world, and the correspondingly different attitudes of God to these manifestations.

God did not forsake the work of his hands but continues to hold the cosmos in place and works out his plan which will one day mean the full restoration of the creation which,

¹² Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Eerdmans, 1996).

as Peter says, will be purified but not annihilated ([2 Pet. 3:10](#)). This is the world that will be renewed and incorporated into the realized kingdom, a new heaven and a new earth in which justice will be the order of the day ([2 Pet. 3:13](#)).

That there is a deep conflict being waged in the world, exerting impact on human culture we learn from the somewhat enigmatic reference to ‘principalities and powers’ of which the apostle Paul speaks. Unless we take due account of these powers we shall not understand human culture today.

Principalities and Powers

Here we draw primarily on the writing of Hendrikus Berkhof.¹³ In [Ephesians 2:2](#) both *aeon* and *cosmos* are used to mean the age of this world which is ruled by sin. Paul speaks elsewhere of the powers of darkness that exercise control in the world ([Col. 1:13](#)). The world in its unity and its totality is the dominion of demonic powers ([Rom. 8:38](#); [1 Cor. 15:24](#); [Col. 2:14](#)). These powers are also called evil spirits in the heavenly places ([Eph. 6:12](#)), and of these Satan is the god of this age ([2 Cor. 4:4](#)). But their sphere of operation is the earth.

The teaching that the world is under the influence of evil powers does not derive from an original dualism between God and the world or between God and the powers. For all that is in heaven and on earth, including these powers, have been created by Christ ([Col. 1:16](#)). The crucified and resurrected Christ is the ground and purpose of the world. Among these powers we should include the state which according to [Romans 13](#) is an ordination of God for our good but which, as [Revelation 13](#) indicates, can become the arch-enemy of the people of God.

Berkhof remarks that the powers were intended to be links connecting God and his creatures. All of them were to be for our good. As it is, we know these powers only in a world in which the powers no longer seek to fulfil their original purpose. Their effect is not to bring us to God but to alienate us from him.

When Paul then speaks of the world under the sway of evil powers, he is indicating the extent to which the fall into sin has brought the creation: the fall involves structures (principalities) as well as people. It has affected the powers that function in such a way that instead of serving God and benefiting people they now separate God from man. Nevertheless, even in their enmity against God and in their tyrannical hold on people, the powers remain creatures of God. They have no original authority but are subjected to God ([Rom. 8:20](#), [Isa. 54:16](#)). They still function as the ‘crossbeams’ of the creation, preserving life from chaos. These powers function both as a cohesive force among people and a divisive power driving a wedge between God and his creatures.

These are the powers that produce the ‘vanity’, the valuelessness, the sense of meaninglessness. To these powers the entire creation has been subjected, all because of the sin of man. At the same time the groaning creation looks for redemption ([Rom. 8:19–23](#)).

Besides teaching that Christ created the powers and that they rose up in opposition to God, Paul teaches that Christ has disarmed the principalities and powers and has made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross ([Col. 2:15](#)). Here for the first time it became apparent that the powers operate, not on their own strength, nor as God’s willing instruments, but as his opponents. It all changed with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus spoke of the prince of the world being cast out when he was lifted up and he would then draw all people to himself ([John 12](#)).

¹³ Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers* (Eerdmans, 1962).

Christ's victory does not mean that the powers have been eliminated, nor that they are without influence. They have been disarmed but not destroyed. In principle they have been defeated, but the struggle goes on. The complete victory will come only at the time of the consummation ([1 Cor. 15:24](#)).

The powers can no longer attain their goal and cannot wipe out the remembrance of Christ from the earth. Further, in their opposition against God, as in the events of the crucifixion, they became unwilling functionaries of God to fulfil his purpose of redeeming the world in Christ.

Yet the principalities and powers continue to play an opposing role in the lives of God's people. For, as Paul informed the people in Ephesus, they must put on the whole armour of God in order to withstand the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm ([6:10-12](#)). The effect of this opposition on culture and mission is enormous.

Paul also claims that Christ has reconciled the world to himself, not imputing their sins to them ([2 Cor. 5:19](#)). God has seated Christ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, not only in this present age but also in that which is to come ([Eph. 1:21](#)). He has even reconciled (pacified) the powers which will once again become a part of God's restoration. They will again be the connecting links between God and his creatures.

It is obviously not easy to identify the powers. The Bible uses many names such as powers, angels, authorities, rulers of this age. They are not separable from persons, nor are they to be identified with them. They are not flesh and blood ([Eph. 6](#)) but they find embodiment in people. They may be said to refer to the structural elements of human life such as laws, rulers, authorities, customs, traditions and norms. They were meant to serve but they have all too often become demonic.

OUR CULTURAL TASK

It is in this world, with its conflicts caused by the principalities and powers that we are called to culture and to evangelization. It is of prime importance that we assume an appreciative/critical approach to western culture.

If we now draw together the threads of our presentation we can single out certain aspects of our cultural responsibility: 1) We should not take flight from the world of culture; 2) We should not simply affirm the world of culture; 3) We should engage creatively in culture as co-workers with God.

Neither world flight nor a flight from culture is an option for the Christian. For God has given us the exalted position of being managers of his creation. To flee from culture is to desert that office. Worldliness cannot be eliminated by world flight because it is basically a matter of the heart.

Nor can we simply affirm the world of culture. To affirm the world without qualification means to claim that it is fundamentally good in its present state. That is an oversimplification; it cannot provide a basis for being active in society and participating in the governance of the world.

The simple affirmation approach fails to take into account the devastation humankind through its revolt against God has brought on the creation. It fails to see the conflict of kingdoms and of worlds and of cultures. Which world, which culture should we affirm?

Western culture, which has in many respects become a world culture, offers greater opportunity now to spread the gospel than in any previous age. All or nearly all the means of communication are at our disposal. We would be negligent not to make full use of these modern means of communication.

But the situation is not at all simple because the major opposing forces, namely the Gospel and the Enlightenment, both operate in our culture. Neither open conflict nor uncritical use offers a solution.

Newbigin calls our attention to the radical discontinuity between all human wisdom and Scriptural teaching. Because of the impact of spirits in our culture, we need to assume a very cautious attitude, testing the spirits, using what is good and rejecting the evil.

If, as we have sought to demonstrate, culture manifests both the redemptive force of the gospel and the disruptive power of evil, it is both the field of operation for the gospel and the enveloping shroud that shuts out the gospel light. For the ordinary educated person the real world is not the world of the Bible but a world that can be explained ever more fully without reference to the hypothesis of God (Newbigin p. 67). To the extent that religion is still granted a place in society it is in the private sphere.

Standing within culture, knowing that it is highly resistant to the gospel, we must continue to proclaim the redemptive grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Creative Co-workers with God

The people of God are no longer minors as in the age of the Old Covenant when they lived under tutors and guardians ([Gal. 4](#)). Now Christ has made his disciple-servants into friends ([Jn. 15:14, 15](#)); and with the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ, they have entered upon full maturity ([Gal. 4](#)). They need no longer be directed in all details by prescriptions for this and proscriptions of that. Redeemed by Christ, they can test and approve what is the perfect will of God for their lives ([Rom. 12:2](#)). This is their life's calling, their spiritual service.

Maturity means freedom and power. It is freedom from the bondage in which the people of God were entangled before they were liberated by the gospel. They who were in bondage to the 'elements' of the world, as people come of age now must stand fast in their freedom in Christ and not again let themselves be burdened by a yoke of slavery ([Gal. 5:1](#)). They should use their freedom, not to cover up evil but to live as servants of God ([1 Pet. 2:16](#)).

The freedom in Christ that constitutes their maturity is therefore not only a freedom *from* but also a freedom *for*. They are called from servitude and into the service of God.

Before coming of age in Christ the people in Galatia lived under the influence of the world powers. At that time the powers performed the positive function of preserving the people in life, even though it was a life of servitude. This allowed them to exist but not to reach their life's goal. But when they were saved in Christ they were redeemed from these powers and became children of God, fully and solely dependent on him and obedient to him ([Gal. 4](#)).

The transition is from a state of minority to the liberty of sonship. The son no longer lives at a distance from the father but enters into a relation of intimate confidence. The father can entrust his affairs to the son for the same Spirit dwells in both of them. God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts so that we can call God *Abba*, Father ([Gal. 4:6](#)).

Having reached the age of maturity every Christian is his/her own priest (just as each Christian is also his/her own prophet and king). All God's people must offer their lives as living stones for the house of God ([1 Pet. 2:5](#)). In short, maturity for the Christian does not in any sense mean pulling away from the hand of God. It is rather living in such a way that Christ is formed in us. For us to live is Christ.

Those people who are not led by the Spirit of Christ have also come of age but in a different way; their maturity consists in a life without God. What they regard as maturity is their presumed independence of God and their use of power which they assume they

can exercise on their own. Here again we can trace the beginning of this counter-maturity to the Enlightenment, in particular to the writing of Immanuel Kant.¹⁴

There are thus two kinds of maturity: the one that recognizes that without Christ, in spite of all the liberty we have in him, we can do nothing ([Jn. 15](#)). He is the vine and we are the branches, and the branch can bear fruit only as long as it remains in the vine. The other kind of maturity takes the opposite position, such as our first parents took when they sought to be like God, wanting to be a law to themselves. For them, maturity is autonomy.

Whether or not they are aware of it, whether or not they rejoice in it, as they participate in the discoveries in the creation, the unbelievers, like the worldly powers, contribute to the realization of God's plan. Here as elsewhere, the wrath of people leads to God's glory ([Ps. 2](#); [76:10](#)).

Maturity in Christ lays on us the task to test the spirits that have gone out into the world, whether they are of God ([1 Jn. 4:1](#)). We can do this because Christ has given us an understanding, and by the anointing of his Spirit we all have knowledge.

The Call to Ambivalent Attitudes to Culture

Just as God has a twofold attitude to the world, Christians too should see their relation to the cosmos and human society as ambivalent. On the one hand, the world is God's great and good creation that continues to display the generosity and goodness of God, a creation that lives in the hope that one day it will be restored when the people of God are fully redeemed.

At the same time, in recognition of the principalities and powers that rise up against the Lord and his anointed, the people of God see the world as an evil kingdom that must be opposed. Like their Lord, they should reject the presumed sovereignty of the Prince of this age. The time will come, said Jesus to his followers, that the world would rejoice but they would mourn ([Jn. 16:20](#)). They should seek the things that are above, where Christ is, and not the things of this earth ([Col. 3](#)). Their citizenship is in heaven from which they expect their Lord to return ([Philp. 3:21](#)). Their basic loyalty is to that kingdom which will come in its fullness only when the end of the age has arrived.

Until the end, the people of God will say that they, like their fathers, are aliens and tenants on the earth ([Lev. 25:23](#)). Peter urges God's people as strangers (*paroikos*) in the world to abstain from sinful desires (1Pet. [2:11](#)). Yet these same persons who look for a saviour from heaven ([Philp. 3:30](#)) should do their utmost to resist the tendency to remove any area of life from the sovereign rule of Jesus Christ. The meek will inherit the earth. We are both strangers and stewards.

In summary, God's people who are not 'of the world' are sent into the world ([Jn. 17:14, 18](#)). Being in the world and yet not of it, they are kept from the evil one through the intercession of Christ ([Jn. 17:12](#)). In the world they will have trouble but they may be of good cheer for Christ has overcome the world ([Jn. 16:33](#)). They should use the things of the world (cosmos) but not be engrossed in them. For the world in its present form is passing away ([1 Cor. 7:3](#)).

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¹⁴ Maturity à la Immanuel Kant and maturity in Christ.

Christian Morality in a Pluralistic Society

Perspectives for Post-Soviet Cultures

Darrell Cosden

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This essay addresses two fundamental questions for Christian ethics—namely: should Christianity seek to influence our pluralistic society with its values and morality and, if so, how do we avoid imposing them on others? The author shows the importance of distinguishing plurality and pluralism and suggests ways for the Church to create a context in which to impact the public forum with its worldview. The paper was first read at a conference in Crimea, Ukraine.
Editor

Keywords: Church, society, morality, ethics, worldview, human dignity, creation, pluralism, plurality

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Historically, Christianity was the dominant voice in both western and ‘Orthodox’ cultures. Broadly speaking, in these contexts Christian conceptions of reality formed both a common morality and the basic fabric of society.¹ This is no longer so. We are now in an age of plurality and pluralism. This means, among other things, that Christianity in general and its moral voice in the public arena in particular, has been relegated to one among many competing voices.

Some are fearful, seeing this as devastating for both the Church and society. Others welcome the shift. On the one hand, there are those who are glad to see Christian morality effectually removed from public life, feeling that ultimately this will be better for humanity in its moral and social functioning. On the other hand, there are those who, while still embracing Christianity and Christian morality, welcome the new situation (although cautiously) in the belief that genuine Christianity desires a level playing field and can stand on its own merits and show itself to be a (or the most) viable option.

The questions that arise with this new situation are whether Christianity can or should seek to have its values and morality influence the broader pluralistic culture? And, if so, how, can this avoid being seen an ‘imposition’? These issues are addressed in turn in this essay. To do this, however, we must begin by considering what we mean both by Christian morality and by a pluralistic society.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CHRISTIAN MORALITY?

¹ One may of course rightly debate the relative levels of syncretism and the influence of paganism from the surrounding culture upon Christian theology and morality throughout history. In this essay however, we proceed on the basis that whatever Christianity was (or became) in its various contexts, it proved to be a centrally unifying force in society and culture.

For examples of how Christianity has interacted with and influenced society see Richard H. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951) and R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, 1937 ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1922).

When considering Christian values and morality one might be tempted to think that the Church presents a monolith characterized by such concepts as faith, hope, love, or the like. It is certainly true that Christianity is universally concerned with these values among others, and that a common Christian morality can be demonstrated. It is not true, however, that there is one identical Christian approach to the questions of morality, ethics, or value.

There are broadly speaking *two* approaches to Christian moral theology. One has been called ‘act decision’ ethics, the other ‘virtue’ ethics.² In the act/decision tradition, the emphasis is on ‘doing’ ethics. The personal decision or the dilemma itself is central. The focus is on what ‘ought’ or ‘should’ be done to achieve the good—either as habitual practices (as for example in the case of normative work ethics) or in a particular crisis situation when key core values may come into conflict with each other and where some resolution must be achieved. One example of the latter would be a decision some may face of whether or not to abort an undesired pregnancy. In this instance, the values associated with the rights to life of the unborn come into conflict with the values of the parent or parents. Here, a crisis exists and some decision or action (each with certain consequences) must be made. Even a non-decision is a type of decision.

Further, even within act/decision ethics, there is disagreement as to how to decide what the good is and on what basis to resolve a dilemma. There are deontological approaches to ethics³ which come to a decision based on either set rules, standards or principles, (whether scripture, tradition or something else), and there are teleological approaches to ethics⁴ which determine a course of action by exploring the desired state (the good however defined) and then considering, apart from rules or norms, what the best way is to achieve that state.

In contrast to act/decision ethics is virtue ethics. The difference is that in virtue ethics the emphasis is placed on what type of persons the moral agents are to be and on the effects these persons have on the broader community. The focus is on ‘being’ a good, ethical or virtuous person in relation to others. When virtue or the virtues are the starting point of Christian morality, it is argued, the agent will ‘be’ moral and thus prone to make the best moral choices.⁵

² For a more detailed discussion of the directions and issues involved in these two types of ethics see Ian C.M. Fairweather and James I.H. McDonald *The Quest for Christian Ethics: An Enquiry into Ethics and Christian Ethics* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1984), pp. 3–92. Here the discussion is structured around the categories: deontological ethics, teleological ethics and motive ethics.

³ ‘Deontological’ is the adjective and ‘deontology’ the noun. The Greek *dei* (stem, *deont-*) means ‘it is right’, ‘it is necessary’.

Examples of the diverse approaches to deontological ethics include: Medieval Catholics scholastic ethics (500–1545 Trent) and the use of the Penitential Books. The ethics of Luther and Calvin. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*. Based on German sixth edition, 1963 ed., Translated by Neville Horton Smith (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1955), Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), sect. II/2, III/4, J. Fletcher, *Situation Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1966) and Richard J. Mouw, *The God Who Commands: A Study in Divine Command Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

⁴ ‘Teleological’ is adjective and ‘teleology’ is the noun. The Greek *telos* means goal, and hence teleological ethics has the goal of moral action in view.

Examples of the diverse approaches to teleological ethics include: Thomas Aquinas, the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham, J.S. Mill and G.E. Moore.

⁵ See Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), Stanley Hauerwas and A. MacIntyre, eds. *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy*, vol. 3. A Series of Books on Ethics (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) and Alasdair MacIntyre, *After*

Initially, these debates may seem to undermine the possibility of common Christian values. Where one finds consensus, however, with respect to a common Christian morality is in thinking of Christian values and morality in relation to worldview. Prominent philosophers, scientists and theologians today agree that the idea of a purely valueless, 'objective' knowledge (in this case moral knowledge) is impossible.⁶ It is a view from nowhere. Each person, and consequently community, whether Christian or not, has particular reference points and ways of looking at the world which answer the basic questions of existence: What is real? Who am I? Where am I and where did I come from? What is wrong? And what is the solution? How we answer these questions, whether consciously or not, forms our view of the world or, worldview.⁷ These views of life, within our respective communities, provide the basis for our value systems which then in turn indicate for us various patterns of appropriate behaviour.

A Christian Worldview

Christian morality (or values) stems from a particular worldview, a Christian one.⁸ And, despite the differences mentioned, there are broad and common values accepted across the Christian spectrum. We highlight two here, not because they are the only ones which can be agreed upon (for they are not), but rather because they are foundational to the overall task of Christian morality, and because they are particularly relevant to the crisis faced in today's society.

The first value is *human dignity and the sanctity of life*. A Christian worldview asserts that God created humanity in his image and likeness and gave to it certain responsibilities. Along with these responsibilities, however, was the possibility of not fulfilling them. Humanity was given freedom, and this freedom carried (and carries) with it certain consequences. Generally speaking, God does not violate this freedom. Further, these endowments, far from being annulled by the fall, were reaffirmed by Christ in his death on the cross. Here, God said yes to humanity. Further, when Christ returns he will ultimately vindicate God's overall purposes and humanity's place within the creation.

The implications of these ideas are innumerable, but they at least suggest that all persons, as created in the image and likeness of God, and as potentially redeemable, are given a transcendent value and have an inherent dignity. Further, as God does not usually violate their moral freedoms of choice, so we too should be careful to respect the freedoms and choices of others. This is so even when we disagree with the choices they make. Of course there is room for intervention, especially when others are put at risk by our choices. Care however must be taken so as not to violate the integrity of the person.

The second value is the *integrity and value of creation* or the material world. God created the world (material) as good and Christ's death on the cross is understood

Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, Second ed. (London: Duckworth, 1985). (MacIntyre's ethics are more philosophical than theological but many Christian ethicists use his work).

⁶ See a summary discussion in Trevor Hart, *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology* (London: SPCK, 1995), pp. 23–70.

See also for more detail A. MacIntyre, M. Polanyi, H. Frei and G. Lindbeck respectively.

⁷ By a worldview technically we mean a set of convictions held either consciously or unconsciously, rationally or non-rationally, lived in a narrative and social context which answer the questions of ultimate reality (Metaphysics), how one can know and experience that reality (epistemology), and what is worth living for in light of that reality (axiology).

⁸ For a discussion of worldview and ethics see Mouw, *The God Who Commands*, pp. 22–42. For a broader discussion see J. Middleton, Richard and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, IL.: InverVarsity Press, 1995).

(beginning in Scripture) as having cosmic redemptive significance. Further, the fact of a promised new earth with embodied creatures inhabiting it suggests that material reality has both value to God and a significant place in eternity.

The implications here are that Christian morality values the creation (the material aspect of existence) and seeks to function within it. Far from being a hindrance to spirituality and morality, the material is foundational to them. Christians have disagreed and will disagree at times as to what this means in practice. However, some form of this value is essential to any Christian worldview and morality.⁹

By calling for a worldview orientation to Christian morality, and by mentioning two particular values which grow from it, our purpose is not to nullify the broader tensions within the Christian family concerning how to approach the questions of morality. These are important questions. One should not find this diversity troubling however, for its existence ensures greater flexibility and demonstrates the possibility that Christian morality is sufficiently nuanced and comprehensive to address the complicated life and death issues faced today.¹⁰ Further, even with such inter-family disagreements, it is important to emphasize that with a Christian worldview orientation, certain values (like the ones mentioned) emerge and point toward a common Christian morality. The general agreement amidst diversity suggests that there is a core Christian morality.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY?

To avoid confusion one must be careful to differentiate between two uses of the term pluralism. On the one hand, there is undeniably the reality of a plurality of voices in society each claiming its rights to be heard and heeded. On the other hand, there is pluralism; a particular philosophy and programme for living in a pluralistic context.¹¹ At times it is assumed that pluralistic philosophy is a necessary component of a pluralistic setting. This, however, is not true. To demonstrate this we will look more carefully at plurality and then at pluralism.

The Plurality of Society

Wherever a society consists of more than one culture, sub-culture, or belief system there is by definition plurality. Indeed, historically even in 'Christian' cultures there has always been plurality of some sort. In our late modern and post-modern contexts however, where the differences between groups becomes a focal point, how to respond to and incorporate this plurality into the whole becomes problematic. The temptation is for the dominant group to seek to avoid anarchy by imposing its views on the minorities. Of course, the secular totalitarian state has been guilty of this vice,¹² but unfortunately so also at times has Christianity. The task and challenge therefore is to develop a system where a plurality of voices, an unavoidable given, can be heard and reasonably incorporated into the whole.

⁹ Potential resources for the exploration of such ideas from an Eastern Christian perspective include the Cappadocian Fathers as well as the writings of St Maximus of Confessor.

¹⁰ For a further discussion of Christian ethics' adequacy in response to its critics see Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Adequacy of Christian Ethics* (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1981).

¹¹ Ian S. Markham, *Plurality and Christian Ethics, New Studies in Christian Ethics*, ed. Robin Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 9–10.

¹² To explore further the difficulty of establishing a genuine plurality in Soviet and post-Soviet life see Carol R. Saivetz and Anthony Jones, eds. *In Search of Pluralism: Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics*, The John M. Olin Critical Issues Series (Oxford: Westview Press and The Harvard University Russian Research Center, 1994).

It follows on this view that in a society of plurality (if there is to be genuine plurality) there is no need for various groups to deny or sacrifice their unique vantage points and perspectives (although there will be times when they must compromise with reference to what can actually be translated into public policy). Indeed, each group is entitled to its own worldview, and for our interests, morality. This is promising for Christian morality, even though there is also the danger that its concerns will be minimized or overlooked by others. At least, what is guaranteed is that the voice of Christian morality has a place at the table.

A Pluralistic Worldview

Pluralism as a philosophical approach, whether religious¹³ or secular, strangely enough denies and undermines this genuine plurality. By pluralism, we mean a particularly radical worldview which argues that every truth claim is relative to the context in which it is made. No truths are universal and thus universally applicable; this includes moral truths. It further argues that each position must accept as *equally* valid the positions of another. This is not a statement on whether each should be allowed a valid opportunity to present its perspectives. Rather, it is an epistemological commitment that no truth claims, moral or otherwise, can be said to be more true or valid than others. Thus, according to pluralism, any group making unique truth claims from its own worldview perspective is deemed to be exclusivist and thus unfit for the public forum.¹⁴

There are at least two problems with this type of pluralism. The first is indirectly offered by Alasdair MacIntyre in his scathing critique of modernity in *After Virtue*. MacIntyre's thesis is that when objectivity, or the possibility thereof, is removed from questions of morality, (as pluralism has done) morality itself is lost by virtue of the fact that the very language of moral discussion is lost (ie. right, wrong, should, ought. . .) MacIntyre's thesis suggests that pluralism logically denies the possibility of asserting morality and thus, runs counter to the impulse of plurality which seeks multiple moral voices.

The second critique, which builds on the first, is that pluralism becomes self defeating through its logical inconsistency. Pluralism asserts that all truth claims are relative to the contexts which produced them and thus, by definition, are not universally valid. This assertion, of course, is itself a 'universal' truth claim which comes from a particular context. Therefore, it too is not universally valid. The assertion itself becomes self defeating in that it attempts to affirm what it in fact cannot. The only way around this dilemma is to claim that this one truth claim is the only a priori universal truth available. This however, rather than placing pluralism above other worldviews as is the intent, simply makes pluralism one more worldview competing for supremacy and thus, a victim of its own system. Pluralism, rather than being necessarily linked with plurality is undermined by both the nature of plurality itself, and its own inconsistencies.

CAN OR SHOULD CHRISTIANITY SEEK TO HAVE ITS VALUES AND MORALITY INFLUENCE THE BROADER PLURALISTIC CULTURE WHICH CONSISTS OF BOTH CHRISTIANS AND NON-CHRISTIANS

¹³ See John Hick, *The Interpretation of Religion* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).

¹⁴ See for a further detailed discussion: Hart, Chs. 1-5.

This brings us back to one of the original questions of this essay. And the answer is without shame, yes. Both the nature of Christian morality and the nature of a pluralistic society (not pluralism) demands that it does.

Christian morality, internal diversity notwithstanding, claims that its truths, though not universally accepted, are in fact universally valid. What Christian morality offers to the world is, in one sense, an alternative morality based on an alternative worldview. While not denying that other worldviews contain elements of this universal morality, Christian morality claims that its worldview and thus its values and patterns of behaviour are more adequate to the promotion of the good than others. It argues that its morality is more consistent with the available data of reality, more internally coherent, and more existentially viable (or livable) than the alternatives. Since this is the posture of Christian morality, it necessarily seeks to influence the contexts in which it finds itself.

Pluralistic society also affirms that Christian morality should be involved in the process of defining and promoting the public good. It seeks to have various worldviews (Christianity included) represent their concerns and morality from their unique perspectives. If Christianity refuses to participate in this process by adopting, even unconsciously, the faulty premises of pluralism, the result will be both a violation of Christian morality and of plurality itself. The consequences of this will be disastrous for a society of plurality and for Christianity.

HOW SHOULD CHRISTIAN MORALITY SEEK TO INFLUENCE THE BROADER SOCIETY AND AVOID BEING SEEN AS AN IMPOSITION ON THE VIEWS OF OTHERS?

Our purpose here is to suggest several directions which can serve as entry points into this complex subject. Our suggestions are not final answers, but are rather meant to be sign posts indicating possible ways forward.

Of course the word 'influence' can mean many (often diverse) things depending on its context. Particularly appropriate to our current discussion are political and demonstrative forms of influence. By political influence, we mean in a generic sense the translation of Christian moral principles (such as were mentioned above) into public policy. By demonstrative influence, we are referring to the posture of the Church and individual or groups of Christians as they enter into the public arena.

The translation of Christian morality into public policy, in the end, requires skilled specialists. These persons must be devoted to understanding the nuances of moral theology as applied in particular and complex contexts. They must also understand the steps and procedures of public policy making. It is recognized that these people are rare.

Ways to Create a Favourable Context

There are however several ways for a society to create a context from which such people will emerge, and in which they will be nurtured. *First*, on a broad level the people in a given society, including its leaders at all levels, need to develop a context in the public arena where plurality is recognized and encouraged. There need to be contextually appropriate types of 'democratic', pluralistic structures where moral issues can be explored and where Christianity is allowed to participate. We are suggesting here that in the government, the educational system, in health care and so forth, there be places where open dialogue and experimentation can occur.

Second, we suggest that the disciplined study of Christianity and Christian morality be incorporated into society as a public discipline.¹⁵ One way to do this is to develop theological faculties in the Universities and other institutions of higher learning. Another way, for example, is to form medical societies and/or journals where Christian morality and health care issues can be explored from various angles.

By moving in these directions, Christian thought and morality is opened to the broader society of both Christians and non-Christians. This is not to imply that Christian morality should compromise itself to other worldviews. Nor does this mean that Christian morality need be divorced from the life of the Church and faith. Rather, it means that the Church makes herself available to others (in at least one respect—her rational aspect), and that she enters into dialogue with other worldviews on more ‘neutral’ ground.

A *third* suggestion for creating a context in society where Christian morality can have influence, is for society’s leaders to consider carefully their own worldviews. All leaders should be critically aware of what convictions and values influence them in their decision making. Some worldview (or ‘religious’ belief system) lies behind every decision made in the public sector, for every decision is made by a person or group of people. Once this ‘view from somewhere’ is recognized, (in addition to a leader wanting to consider carefully whether or not his or her own worldview is adequate and accurate), he or she will enter into public debate more personally humble and sympathetic to the views of others.

This will not necessarily mean that Christian values will be adopted into public policy. It will however mean that Christian morality will be given as fair a chance as any competing view. Then, the responsibility is on Christianity to show that its values better fit the data and provide a better way to the good than the others.

The Church Impacts the Public Forum

This leads us to consider what posture the Christian Church should adopt while moving into the public arena. We suggest that the way of demonstration or persuasion is a more effective, and a more appropriate method of influence than that of power/party politics.¹⁶ Demonstration or persuasion suggests that Christians work with the people they want to influence, not through threats or imposition, but rather at a worldview level. If Christian morality corresponds to truth or reality at any points, and if it is a better way to the good than the alternatives, it should at least be able to demonstrate satisfactorily these points to itself, and to some degree, to others.

Here the Church needs to involve itself, not as a ‘powerful’ institution seeking to pressure others, but rather as believing Christians and fellow members of society seeking to bring their worldview to the public forum. For this task the Church needs to produce skilled theologians, apologists and ethicists who are able to participate in the debates. For it is only through persuasion that these Christian men and women, and thus Christian morality in general, will retain integrity, and thus be a distinctively Christian influence on the surrounding culture.

In conclusion, we emphasize that the task for Christian morality in a pluralistic society is enormous and yes, often dangerous. However, it is also characterized by hope; but not

¹⁵ See: Hart, *Faith Thinking*, Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (London: SPCK, 1991) and Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Problems of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) and David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1981), pp. 3–46.

¹⁶ For a further discussion see John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1972).

a naive utopianistic hope that we can make society perfect. Rather, the Christian hope believes that because of Christ's death and resurrection there is the possibility of bringing any society (at least for a time and to some degree) under the Lordship of Christ and thus in line with Christian morality. Nonetheless, Christians are also realistic and affirm that until the return of Christ and the consummation of his kingdom, any progress that we make will be both imperfect and incomplete. At this point in history however, any progress would be welcomed.

Cyber-Theology: Doing Theology with a Personal Computer

David Parker

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This important article points to the paradigm shift that is now taking part in the way we understand our theological task. The author lifts our horizons beyond using the computer as a word processor to the ever-expanding technological possibilities of multi-media operations, the range of software available and the potential for the Internet using email and web. He suggests ways in which the computer can enhance theological teaching and administration but cautions the need for skill and patience, security, privacy and copyright, the stewardship of funds, and the danger of over reliance on high technology. The Theological Commission is looking at using the Internet extensively to facilitate its activities such as publications, study units and consultations.
Editor

Keywords: Technology, Christian ministry, hardware, software, program, printer, Internet, e-mail, the Web, word-processing, database, missiology, administration

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest gifts of modern technology is the personal computer (PC), especially for theologians and others who are in the business of working with words and ideas. Personal computers, which now have enormous power compared with those available only a short time ago, have revolutionized access to and processing of information. This article¹ is a general introduction to some of the main ways a PC can be used by theological students and educators, administrators, pastors, missionaries and others in Christian ministry. It concentrates on the mainstream rather than the highly specialized applications, and makes suggestions which readers can follow up on in their own local context. The information given here applies generally to both IBM-compatible computers

¹ Acknowledgment is made of trade and brand names mentioned in this article, which are registered trademarks of their respective owners. Mention of a particular product does not imply endorsement or otherwise.

(usually referred to as the PC) and the Apple Macintosh series. The emphasis is on PCs because they are so common, and software for them is readily available; however, the Apple has special advantages in education and graphics.

I. COMPUTER ESSENTIALS

A computer consists essentially of a Central Processing Unit (CPU) which is a powerful miniaturized electronic calculator to carry out the main operations, internal memory (Random Access Memory RAM) to hold information and instructions for the CPU, disks (both fixed 'hard disks' and removable 'floppy disks') using magnetic technology similar to tape recorders to store data and programs, devices such as a keyboard and scanner to input data and instructions, a monitor (Video Display Unit VDU) to display information and a pointing device (mouse, trackball) to help control the computer.

The physical components of a computer are called hardware, while the electronic instructions given to the computer to enable it to perform some useful task are called software or programs. A computer needs some inbuilt software to set itself up properly, or to 'boot' it up initially; it then needs an operating system (OS), usually stored on its main hard disk, to control the various functions including use of disks, keyboard, monitor, modem and printer. Finally it needs application software to carry out specific tasks such as word processing, database management or communication with another computer. Testing and diagnostic software is also useful for troubleshooting and maintaining the computer system; anti-virus software is necessary to combat these small programs which are designed to destroy data, cripple a computer or to cause a nuisance.

The first operating systems made use of typed instructions using commands such as 'copy' or 'delete'; the most well known product of this kind for PCs was Microsoft Disk Operating System (MS-DOS). There are some DOS based computer programs still in use, but most modern computers now use a Graphical User Interface (GUI); Microsoft Windows is the dominant product. In this 'point and click' system, pioneered by Apple computers and followed by Microsoft, a mouse moves a cursor (perhaps an arrow or a flashing vertical marker) to a certain area of the screen display identified by a box or image known as an icon; a button-operated switch on the mouse then activates the computer to perform the indicated operation (such as printing a document or inserting an image); the mouse is also used to select text or images for manipulation by the computer (such as converting regular text to italics or resizing the image). A GUI system is convenient to use and provides a great deal of control over data; it displays the data as it will be printed out in 'what you see is what you get' (WYSIWYG) fashion.

There are also optional peripheral devices such as printers to produce written copies of data, modems to connect the computer to a telephone line for the transference of computer, fax or voice data to and from a remote computer. Most computers today support multi-media operations, having software and hardware (a sound card and loud speakers) to play and process audio signals, especially music; other software can also be used to display graphic images, animation and video information. Compact Disks (CD), which are similar to audio CDs, are frequently used in multi-media work because they can store a great deal more information than the ordinary magnetic variety (around 500 times the average).

Technology is rapidly improving, so new features and more powerful computers are becoming available continuously, allowing more advanced software to be used; however

older, more limited machines will still perform satisfactorily with appropriate software.² Small portable 'notebook' computers are in common use, giving the advantage of compactness and mobility. The best of them have similar computing power to desktop models, although they are still limited by battery life which is usually only a few hours at maximum; however, they are much more expensive than desktop PCs and less flexible in regard to upgrading and expanding facilities.

Application Software

Commercially available software ranges from relatively simple, stand-alone programs designed for a specific limited function (such as making back-up copies of data on a floppy disk for security) through to integrated suites covering a large number of functions or highly customised applications designed for complex business situations.

The most common packages are manufactured in large numbers by major suppliers and sold around the world, often in various versions taking account of languages and other local requirements. Software comes on CDs, or less commonly on the older magnetic disks, together with instructional manuals; increasingly, new software and especially upgrades and new versions are available on the Internet (see later). All software needs to be installed on to the computer and configured before it can be used. Modern software may occupy many megabytes of disk space and require high power computers to run successfully.

Good software companies usually supply assistance for the user through careful design and testing of the program, clear instruction manuals and help screens available while using the software; after sales service is also important, but it is often costly. Technically speaking, it is easy to copy software from another computer or from original disks, but the practice is illegal as it breaches copyright (the same as in printed matter); some software companies prosecute offenders, seeking heavy penalties through the courts to stamp out the practice, arguing that illegally copied software costs the producers heavily in loss of revenue.

Printers

Printing of documents is usually as important as creating them. The most common older computer printer, known as the dot matrix printer, uses a series of fine moveable pins (9, or 24 for higher quality) in the printhead to form letters; as the head passes across the paper, the pins are actuated and pressed against a ribbon, producing the imprint on the paper in much the same way as a typewriter. They are fast, reliable and economical to produce and maintain; while still in use for certain applications, they are rapidly becoming obsolete, producing less attractive output than their competitors and being unsuitable for use with GUI interfaces.

For low volume use, inkjet printers, which deposit fine drops of ink on the page in the shape of the letter or image, are most popular. They work equally well for colour as for black and white, and are inexpensive to buy. Using good quality non-porous bond paper, they can produce surprisingly good results, although not all ink is waterproof; using special paper and ink cartridges, colour photograph quality printing can be achieved. However, inkjet printers are not ideal for large fonts or dark images which require lots of ink.

² At the time of writing an average level PC will have a high level Pentium or Pentium II CPU with 32 megabytes of RAM, 2.5 gigabytes HDD, 15 inch monitor, 24 speed CD ROM drive and sound card and run Windows 95. Note that memory and storage is measured in gigabytes and megabytes; giga = 1,000 million; mega = 1 million; byte = the unit of computer data. A standard 3 inch floppy disk holds 1.44mb of data.

The laser printer is the heavy duty office standard. It works on the same process as the photocopier by using electrostatic principles to place small particles of carbon on the paper in the required patterns; the carbon is fixed in place by heat and pressure. The laser printer is more expensive to purchase than the inkjet, but it is cheaper to run; colour laser printing is very expensive. Lasers are good for high volume work, but may need extra memory to cope with large and complicated page layouts and graphics.

Both inkjet and laser units can produce camera-ready copy for offset printing, and of course are excellent for photocopied productions in association with desk top publishing and high-end word processing software.

Keyboards, Scanners and OCR

Entry of data to the computer is usually carried out by a keyboard which is similar in layout to the standard typewriter; the computer keyboard has several extra keys, some of which are numeric keys like a calculator and others are used to control various functions of the computer.

Electronic scanners, either flatbed (like a photocopier) or smaller hand held units, are now also in frequent use. They take an 'electronic photo' of the original which, with suitable software, can be inserted into another document, printed out or edited to enhance, resize or modify the image; even low level software gives a great deal of control over the colour and content of the image, enabling a piece of art-work to be re-shaped or unwanted features cropped from a photograph before use. A scanner can also be used in conjunction with a suitably equipped computer as a fax machine and as a copier. Photographic images can also be obtained directly from a digital camera which uses computer techniques instead of chemistry to record the image.

Another process, optical character recognition (OCR), can be applied to text documents which have been scanned into the computer; this converts the image into a series of characters which the computer can handle in the same way as if they had been entered using the keyboard. Scanners with OCR software therefore can be used to eliminate the need for laborious re-typing of data. High quality scanners and software can successfully convert even poor originals, and maintain paragraphing, fonts and columns, thus lessening the need for further editing.

II. INTERNET

The Internet is the latest growth area in computing. Its huge popularity around the world can also be harnessed for theological work.

The Internet is essentially the linking together of computers and networks of computers around the world. It began as a network of military computers, and it was set up in a decentralized form for security reasons. Thus, not being a hierarchical system, there is no one with ultimate control of the network or of the data that is stored on the computers connected to it. To connect to the Internet, computer systems must, of course, support the common technical protocols which allow the exchange of data, and some countries limit access according to their own internal policies. But otherwise, each person or institution connecting to the Internet is responsible for content and access. Data on the Internet may pass through many links and computers before it reaches its final destination, which poses problems for security and privacy.

The Internet extended rapidly from its original functions, particularly into university, research, scientific and government areas. In recent years it has been opened up to private users through Internet Service Providers (ISPs) working with telecommunication corporations in their own countries, who are in turn linked with the rest of the world; the

ISP sells Internet access to private consumers who either dial up through the normal telephone network or, in the case of larger institutions, make use of fixed data lines that have been connected to their premises.

For Internet access, a consumer needs a reliable phone line, a computer equipped with suitable software and a modem and an account with an ISP. ISPs may impose an initial set up fee, and then charge for time used and sometimes for the amount of traffic passed; there are usually discounts for bulk purchase and higher volumes. If the ISP is not within a user's local call area, then the consumer will need to pay long distance telephone toll charges as well. Larger institutions may have a network of computers through which Internet access is gained. This network may operate on the same kind of technology as the Internet, when it is called an Intranet. There is now a trend for a closer integration of the Internet with the PC so that using data and applications on the desktop computer or the local Intranet is indistinguishable from the Internet itself.

When a computer is connected to the Internet, either temporarily by dial-up access or by a permanent link, a number of different operations can be carried out. For example, files can be transferred to or from another computer using File Transfer Protocol (FTP), live communication can be made using Internet Relay Chat (IRC) which is like a telephone party line or a CB radio link. The user's computer can become a terminal of a remote computer using Telnet. But perhaps the two most popular functions are e-mail and the World Wide Web (WWW).

E-mail

E-mail is a system of sending messages from one computer to another using a system of unique addressing which enables the network to route them correctly to their destination. (For dial-up systems, e-mail is held on the ISP's computer until the subscriber logs on to read it.) An E-mail address consists of an identifier, often related to the subscriber's name, followed by codes to identify the computer, its network and its country (USA has no country identifier), separated by the symbol '@'. For example, the address John.Smith@supplier.com.au is the computer in the name of John Smith connected to a (hypothetical) Australian commercial network; other types of networks are indicated by net, gov, edu, mil. However, it is not necessary to know anything about the location or nature of an e-mail to send messages.

E-mail is quick, simple and economical, especially in comparison with ordinary mail; messages may be written in whatever style the author wishes, provided the rules of 'etiquette' are observed. E-mail messages can be sent to more than one recipient simultaneously; received messages can be forwarded on to other addressees either intact or in edited form, and they can be inserted into wordprocessing and other documents and printed out or processed as required. In addition, any other kind of computer files (documents, images, programs etc) can be linked to e-mail messages as 'attachments' and transmitted with them to the recipient; this provides a rapid and economical alternative to sending the files by other means, such as on a disk through the post.

A popular specialized form of e-mail known as 'mailing lists' allows a message from one person to be sent to all the others who have enrolled for that particular list; another form, called 'newsgroups' places a message on a forum or kind of electronic bulletin-board which anyone who logs onto the particular newsgroup can read. There are very large numbers of these groups in existence, discussing a vast range of mainline and fringe topics; new groups are being set up continuously. While many of them operate at a popular level or are frivolous (or worse), they are very important in academic circles where they function as extended seminars for discussion and channels for obtaining

scholarly information. They can also be used to handle business, such as organizational arrangements for international meetings.

The Web

The World Wide Web (WWW or The Web) has become the most popular form of Internet usage, absorbing many of the functions which were previously handled by separate applications. The principle is simple: using appropriate software the user's computer can request a particular file or 'page' from a remote computer and display it on the local monitor. This file can contain text, graphics, animation, video and sound in any combination. It can also contain hyperlinks which are electronic addresses which, when activated, are interpreted by the software as instructions to retrieve a file from the nominated address. Pages can also contain response forms and 'mail to' hyperlinks which automatically activate e-mail software ready to send a message to the nominated recipient; they can also give instructions to the computer to transfer a file from a remote location. Web pages can be very attractive, making full use of colour, graphics and multi-media techniques, thus bringing together computer expertise with printing, design and layout arts; Web page design is a rapidly developing enterprise.

Each page is identified and located by a Web address or Uniform Resource Locator (URL) of the basic form: <http://www.yourinstitution.com.au> (often the initial <http://> is omitted) Thus the publishers of this journal have as their Web address, www.paternoster-publishing.com while the sponsoring body, the World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission can be found at <http://www.WorldEvangelical.Org/noframes/2theol.htm>

The software used to access Web pages is called a Web browser; the two commonly used are Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer. The browser recognizes the particular code (HyperText Mark Up Language or HTML) in which the pages are written, and displays them appropriately. The browser also enables pages to be saved on the local computer for later use; they can also be printed and inserted into other documents. Reading Web pages that are full of graphics can be time consuming on a slow modem connection, so browsers (and some Web sites) offer a text-only alternative; unfortunately, many Web designers think only of the higher performance users and often include necessary information in graphical form.

Pages at a given site can be associated together like a book, with the first page in the series usually being referred to as the Home Page; they can also have links to any other Web pages. Pages are usually made up and tested on a local computer and then up-loaded to the ISP's computer which may be located anywhere in the world.

HTML pages can be composed manually using very simple text editing software, but the task can be greatly simplified by specialized software which controls the creative process and manages the pages efficiently to ensure consistency and proper links between them.

In a typical Web site, a theological institution may have a Home Page introducing the school, with opportunity for enquiries using e-mail and response forms; there will also be several subsidiary pages complete with illustrations giving information about courses, staff, buildings etc. It therefore acts as an electronic version of the conventional school catalogue. There can also be texts of lectures, academic papers, reports and other documents, perhaps with video clips or music and links to the pages of the sponsoring denomination, the accrediting association, other similar institutions and academic journals.

The school's academic journal could be available on the Web site, presenting either extracts of previously published articles or a full electronic magazine (or e-zine) with introductory cover pages, indexes, and footnoting and the same kind of editorial control

that would apply to the conventional printed version; the advantage of electronic publishing is that there are no printing or postage costs and the material can be updated quickly; the content and usefulness of the e-zine can be greatly enhanced by providing hyperlinks in the text and notes to other documents and Web pages, such as those related to the theme of the article or other works by the same author.³

The site could also be linked to the school library with its catalogue accessible on-line and a system of ordering books for loan or requesting xerox copies of journal articles by mail or fax. Some sites offer links to local tourist and civic organizations so prospective students and supporters can learn about the context in which the school operates.

The Web is very useful for disseminating information in attractive forms, either with pages of information for direct reading or by providing details of sources of information as a bibliography or by links to other Web pages. Many missionary and educational bodies, churches and para-church organizations have found Web pages to be ideal for promoting their activities. Some commercial organizations protect their data with passwords which are available only after paying a fee for access.

For users, the Web can be seen as a giant encyclopaedia, with information on virtually every topic available somewhere. Because anyone with Internet access can provide information, the reliability and quality of the material found on the Web varies with the integrity of the supplier. However, the huge range and amount of material and the decentralized nature of the Internet makes it difficult to locate the required data. To assist with this task, 'search engines' have been set up which function as subject catalogues; the user enters a topic or name into an input form, and the search engine responds with a list of matching Web pages. Some engines work on a subject basis while others search Web pages directly for words matching the required topic. So it is necessary to understand the methods employed by the particular search engine to gain good results.⁴

With skill and patience, it is possible to use the Internet to great advantage, but care must be taken regarding issues of security, privacy and copyright.⁵

III. OTHER COMPUTER APPLICATIONS

Word Processing

Word processing software is likely to be the most commonly used by theologians. The standard commercial packages now available such as Microsoft Word, Corel WordPerfect and Lotus Word Pro, are extremely powerful; they offer a whole range of features from the basic editing operations (such as copy, move, delete and font change) through to mail merge, graphics, desk-top publishing (DTP) and Web publishing.

These word processing packages have excellent page layout and graphics features which make them useful for the production of notes, charts, diagrams and other teaching aids for photocopying or overhead transparencies. They are also powerful enough to produce booklets and other small publishing projects using photocopiers or the off-set

³ For an example of an e-zine, see TC- the Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism at www.press.umich.edu/jep/03-01/TC.html and for a full listing of academic journals on the Web, <http://info.lib.uh.edu/wj/webjour.htm>

⁴ Some search engines are Altavista, Lycos, Yahoo, Hotbot. Most browsers have pre-installed links for searching; many ISP home pages also provide a range of search opportunities.

⁵ For more information about the use of the Internet, see Quenten J. Schultze, *Internet for Christians* (Muskegon, MI: Gospel Films, Second Edition 1996) and his Web site (which includes a virtual appendix to the book) at www.gospelcom.net/ifc

process; specialized Desk Top Publishing (DTP) packages are also available at modest prices which provide more precise control of layout.

There are also more limited versions of these and other applications which offer fewer features at reduced cost and often with several different types of application integrated into one package for easier use; requiring less experience to use effectively, they are often bundled with software pre-installed on new computers and are sufficient for many situations.

Database Management and Spreadsheets

Database management programs are also useful aids for theological work. They function essentially as an electronic version of the familiar card index system; computerisation gives much greater power and convenience for sorting, finding and displaying information. Database programs can be obtained in a general form which are easy for beginners to use; more advanced packages feature fully programmable software, while some installations are highly customised for a specific situation.

Management of personal research notes, student records and library catalogues are typical uses for a database program. Administrators will use them for keeping track of church members, staff and students; data fields can be set up to cater for whatever information is needed, such as names, addresses, positions held, interests; photographs can be scanned in and attached to each person's record, and the phone, fax and e-mail contact details in the database can be linked directly to the local computer and its modem to eliminate the need for manual dialing. A database can be used in conjunction with word processing to produce personalised form letters and mail labels through the mail-merge process.

Spreadsheets, which are a type of database set out in a grid of columns and rows, are particularly useful for numerical and financial data because formulas can be inserted into the cells to perform calculations. They lend themselves well to statistical work, and can produce a wide range of charts for presentation of data.

Converting files from other systems is now common, which means that in addition to typing or scanning your own document, you can make use of one created on another computer and sent on a disk, transferred by e-mail or down loaded from the Web; it can then be edited as required, replacing or moving text, adding foot/end notes, highlighting text and background in various colours for emphasis, checking grammar and spelling and formatting it. In addition, data can be transferred from one application to another, making for more convenience and efficiency. Thus a chart can be created in a spreadsheet, and then used (and updated if required) in a word processing document or published on the Web.

Specialised Word Processing and Databases

Typical home and business word processing packages can support different language fonts, including the biblical languages; some can even move the cursor from right to left as appropriate. However, for the serious student, there are specialized packages designed for scholarly use which have superior language and editing facilities.⁶ One disadvantage with specialist word processors, however, is the possibility that their data files may not be compatible with other mainstream systems making transfer of material and general flexibility of the computing system difficult.

⁶ One of the most powerful is Nota Bene, currently in a DOS version; some of its once special features are now common in Windows-based word processors but a Windows version is due soon. Infomatics 285 West Broadway Suite 460, New York NT 10013 (www.notabene.com)

Another feature of academic word processing (either in specialized programs or as add-ons to standard packages) is the ability to manage references and bibliographies efficiently. The most common principle used is inserting a code into the document wherever a reference is required; when the reference software is run, the codes are replaced with full data about the book or journal article drawn from a database of information which has been prepared in advance. The data is set out according to the format of the nominated style (MLA, Chicago etc.) Furthermore, all the references are scanned and a bibliography of cited works (in appropriate format) is placed at the end of the document. Over time, the user can build up a very large database of bibliographical material. The system relieves a great deal of tedious re-typing; in some cases, it is possible to download bibliographical material from library catalogues and publishers' databases which eliminates the need for manual entry. In others, the user's research notes can be managed in a database form and inserted into text documents with ease.⁷

Other packages specialize in linking word processors to the text of the Bible, either in various contemporary translations or in the original and/or ancient languages complete with the appropriate fonts. The simplest function of these packages is to act as an electronic concordance, locating the occurrences of particular words or passages and either studying them on the screen or inserting them into a document such as a lecture outline or a sermon. The user may select any of the Bible versions installed on the computer, and perform powerful searches which are capable of identifying combinations and usages not possible in a printed concordance.⁸

While the results of such operations may be enlightening, some limitations of computer Bible study should be noted. First of all, where transcription from older sources is involved, particularly in ancient languages, the computerised text may not be totally error free; this should not be a problem with modern versions. Then the computer is limited to searching on precise words or character strings; this means it will miss synonyms and related words unless separate searches are made for them, and it will be difficult to make significant searches in the modern non-literal translations in which a great of paraphrasing takes place; the same applies to dynamic equivalence translations. One solution to this is to use some kind of thematic or topical indexing, but this is one step

⁷ For a page showing details of various Bibliographical Software Packages by John G. Norman, see <http://www-writing.berkeley.edu/chorus/eresearch/essays/known.html>

⁸ For reviews of some packages, see *Bible Archaeology Review*, (May/June 1997) 54–64 and www-writing.berkeley.edu/chorus/bible/index.html. Some well known packages are: Bible Windows (Silver Mountain Software, 1029 Tanglewood Cedar Hill TX 75104–3019 USA; <http://www.silvrmnt.com>) Bible Works for Windows (Hermeneutika Software PO Box 2200 Big Fork MT 59911–2200 USA; www.bibleworks.com) Gramcord and Accord (for Mac) (Gramcord Institute, 2218 NE Brookview Dr., Vancouver, WA 98686 USA; www.gramcord.org) IVP Study Bible (Lion Publishing, Peter's Way, Sandy Lane West, Oxford, UK, OX4 5HG England; www.lion-publishing.co.uk/lion-pages/page_3.html) Logos Bible Software (Logos Research Systems, 2117 200th Ave W., Oak Harbor, Washington 98277–4049 USA; www.logos.com) NavPress Wordsearch (NavPress Software, 1934 Rutland Drive, Suite 500, Austin, TX 78758–5418, USA; www.gospelcom.net/navsoft) Nelson's Electronic Bible Reference Library (Nelson/Word Electronic Publishing, 501 Nelson Pl., Nashville Tn 37214 USA; www.nelsonword.com/library/ihtml) Quickverse (Parsons Technology, 1 Parsons Drive, Hiawatha, Iowa 52233 USA; www.parsonstech.com/infocentral/media) Word Study Bible (AMG Publishers; 6815 Shallowford Road, Chattanooga, TN 37421 USA; www.gospelcom.net/amg/html/publishers.html)

removed from the biblical text itself. Another popular solution is to key the biblical text to the numbering system used by Strong's Concordance, thus identifying the word in translation with its biblical original.⁹

Most packages also offer other related functions. The text can be hyper-linked to reference material such as a Bible dictionary, atlas, concordance, lexicon or commentary; by selecting a particular verse, word or theme in the biblical text, the computer will locate related information in the supporting works; this information can be displayed, inserted into the word processing document or printed for further study. Packages which link with standard scholarly reference material can be extremely useful because of their efficient search capacity; linking to collections of sermon illustrations and music is appealing for preachers and worship leaders. However, the devotional and older popular material which is often available in large quantities on CD is of dubious value.

More advanced packages work directly with specialized forms of the Hebrew and Greek text, which have grammatical information attached or tagged to each word. This means that the parsing of each word may be displayed, or in other cases, it is possible to search for and display words according to their lexical and grammatical forms; thus a search could be made for the occurrences of a certain inflection or Greek word (whatever the actual inflection) or the various instances of a particular syntactical construction involving either specific words or generally. As in many of the cases already cited, the computer is able to combine searches according to Boolean logic (AND, OR, NOT etc) and by proximity (finding instances of hit terms within a certain number of words of each other).

While direct links to computerised forms of lexicons, exegetical and grammatical dictionaries and similar reference works can be highly valuable, it should be noted that grammatical information provided in the tagged biblical texts is only as reliable as the decisions of editors who created them; it is important to understand the principles employed in the construction of a tagged text before it can be used reliably. Furthermore, the features of the search software need to be taken into account.

Other more specialized computer applications can be mentioned briefly. Textual criticism lends itself to computerisation on the grounds that manuscripts can be grouped into families on the basis of the degree of agreement between them as revealed in their variant readings. Computer programs can be devised to carry out the mathematical work of discovering the patterns amongst the variants, relating the various manuscripts to each other in a hierarchical pattern and printing out the results in chart (family tree) form. The results reported for this experimental work appear promising, but much more work needs to be done on both the application and theoretical aspects before it can be considered as a reliable procedure. But as B. Fischer has observed, the complexity of data involved in NT text criticism is so great that computerised assistance is virtually mandatory.¹⁰

⁹ Harry Hahne, 'Interpretive implications of using Bible-search software for New Testament Grammatical Analysis' presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, 24 Nov 1994, on www-writing.berkeley.edu/chorus/bible/essays/ntgram.html. See also Alan F. Segal 'Electronic Echoes: using computer concordances for Bible Study', *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Nov/Dec 1997), pp. 58–60, 74–75. For links to Bible texts at the Center for the Computer Analysis of Texts at the University of Pennsylvania, see <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/teachtech/resources.html>

¹⁰ See James D. Price, 'A computer aid for textual criticism', *Grace Theological Journal* 8.1 (1987), 115–129, for an outline of the principles involved and a somewhat dated review of literature; for an example of the procedure, see idem, 'A computer-aided textual commentary on the Book of Philippians', *Grace Theological Journal* 8.2 (1987), 253–90.

Computers are also used extensively to assist in translation work by groups such as the United Bible Societies and the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). Typical applications include desk-top publishing and computer-typesetting of translated Scriptures and literacy materials; word processing, complex text formatting and editing of the manuscripts (often using non-Roman alphabets); graphical speech analysis, language and vocabulary analysis, dictionary and concordancing utilities and computer-aided translation.

IV. COMPUTERS AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATIONAL

Computers have become important in most forms of education, with governments and private institutions investing large sums of money in training, software development and equipment. Theological education can also benefit from this technology, but care needs to be taken to sift out the more ephemeral material, and to avoid problems of copyright and plagiarism which arise from the ease with which material may be accessed and processed.

At the simplest level, there is the creative use of computers to produce course material, both printed and electronic. Then computer-aided- instruction can assist with the learning of certain types of material, especially biblical languages by offering a type of electronic flash card which is useful for drill and testing.

Many reference works are now available on multi-media CD, bringing text, maps, photographs, sound and video clips together; this medium lends itself to historical and cultural subjects in biblical, historical and missiological areas. Standard works such as Bible dictionaries, atlas and commentary sets can be searched quickly and efficiently, while most creeds, confessions and other church documents are available in computerised form for study.¹¹

Topical productions are gradually making their appearance; for example, a CD devoted to the Dead Sea Scrolls provides an ideal introduction to the subject with the text and images of the scrolls themselves, videos and animated reconstructions of the Qumran settlement, lectures by recognized scholars combined with standard material on the history, background and content of documents.¹²

A number of commercially produced databases are also available which are useful for theological work. For example, the Religion Database, published by ATLA, is the electronic version on CD ROM of the index to articles and book reviews in the leading theological periodicals; this index has been available in printed form and on a dial-up database for many years. The CD-ROM contains powerful search software, the index of more than 900,000 articles from almost 1400 journals dating from 1949 along with citations from multi-author works and additional data, including Doctor of Ministry dissertation titles. Several subsets of the full CD, focusing on specific areas of study are also available at

¹¹ Some contemporary reference works that are available on CD include: Anchor Bible Dictionary, Bible and Christianity (Lion), Evangelical Commentary of the Bible (Elwell), Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Elwell), Expositor's Bible Commentary, New Bible Atlas, New Bible Commentary, New Bible Dictionary, New Interpreter's Bible. The Sage Digital Library is a very large collection of Bibles, commentaries, reference and theology books including the Ante-Nicene and the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Josephus, many of the Puritan and Holiness writers and scores of others; www.sagelibrary.com

¹² 'Dead Sea Scrolls Revealed' from Logos Research Systems; Parson's Technology publish 'A Walk in the footsteps of Jesus.'

reduced cost.¹³ The well known Religious and Theological Abstracts is also available on CD-ROM, with the advantage of abstracts as well as bibliographic information.

The entire corpus of ancient Greek literature up to 600 AD is available on a CD ROM, published under the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG) project based at the University of California at Irvine, School of Humanities. With suitable search software, this opens up enormous possibilities in the comparison of the NT and other early Christian documents with the ancient world. Similarly, Latin literature well into the history of the church is also available.

Theological work will also benefit from the many other secular CD database indexes that are in common use; those in the area of education, sociology, philosophy and other areas in the humanities are likely to be the most fruitful. General purpose reference works are now also readily available on CD, including the famous *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; these are often associated with Web sites which provide current information to update the CD.

Church growth and missiology can profit from mapping cultural and demographic information available from a variety of sources, especially on CD from government and similar public agencies and the Internet.¹⁴

A good deal of information directly related to theological work is available on the Web, including publishers' promotional material, details of schools and colleges and their faculties and courses, catalogues of university and seminary libraries, contemporary and traditional texts and electronic magazines. News groups and mailing lists can keep students and faculty up to date with current discussion on topics of interest, while home pages of various types of religious and other organizations will provide a window on the contemporary religious and social world. There are scores of special interest sites and discussion groups in areas of faculty expertise and in cross-disciplinary interests.

Distance education can be enhanced greatly by the use of computers and the Internet. There is a steady increase in the amount of course material available using these means, while some seminaries are offering complete programmes. This involves not only publicity, enrolments, and display of requirements for courses along with bibliographic and other resources, but presentation of course content, and submission and return of assignments by e-mail, discussion groups, and posting of grades. The whole system makes up what is called the 'virtual campus'.¹⁵

Administration

Computers can be greatly useful in the administration of a church, mission or theological institution, and they can assist pastors and administrators personally. Personal computers in large offices are frequently linked by a Local Area Network (LAN) which makes applications, data and peripherals available to any computer in the system, thus saving on expense and enhancing productivity. Using suitable software, computers can also be operated remotely over a telephone line. Thus a field worker could access data on the office computer from a distant location by dialling in on a nominated phone line; Web

¹³ American Theological Library Association, 820 Church Street, Suite 400, Evanston Illinois 60201-5613; <http://atla.library.vanderbilt.edu/atla/market/cg98rdb.html>. The complete list of journals indexed is available on <http://atla.library.vanderbilt.edu/atla/market/riojrnls.html>

¹⁴ Global Mapping International, 7899 Lexington Drive Suite 200A, Colorado Springs, CO 80920 USA. (www.gmi.org)

¹⁵ For a recent discussion of this trend see 'Distance learning to the rescue?' (*Christianity Today* 17 Nov 1997 p. 68), and for some examples, www.trinitysem.edu and www.online.georgefox.edu

sites provided by the organization will be of increasing assistance to field workers and clients.

In addition to word processing, DTP and database work already mentioned, accounting software is perhaps the most useful application in administration. It ranges from the simplest packages suitable for personal and family budgeting to the sophisticated systems which meet all the standards of professional chartered accountants. Well designed finance software enables trained but otherwise unqualified staff to carry out day to day book-keeping with accuracy and convenience.

Personal information management software acts like a powerful electronic diary, keeping track of engagements, contacts, addresses and phone numbers. Presentation software prepares and controls colourful 'slides' depicting attractive images, charts, maps and other diagrams which can be used in promotional work, displays and training.

Fax software eliminates the need to have a separate fax machine, especially when used in conjunction with a scanner; combination colour printer, scanner, copier and fax machines are now readily available thus reducing the amount of office equipment needed. It is also possible to conduct telephone conversations via computer links, with television and live video. Tele-conferencing is also another high level feature which brings people together from remote locations via video or Internet links; while it may be expensive initially, if there is sufficient usage, the outlay may be compensated for by the accompanying reduction in the time and cost of travel and accommodation.

CONCLUSION

New applications are constantly being discovered to make use of the power and convenience of computers. When used wisely, they can be, like other forms of technology (including radio, audio recordings and aviation) greatly beneficial to the kingdom of God. However, issues relating to proper stewardship of funds and (over) reliance on high (and possibly, inappropriate) technology must be taken into account. Users should avoid the temptation to purchase pirated or otherwise unlicensed software; the cost can sometimes be reduced by use of shareware,¹⁶ bulk buying, academic pricing (heavy discounts to encourage students to start with and continue using a company's products) and site or multiple licences. Tuition in the use of software and after-sale support increase the value and effectiveness of one's investment. Care is also needed to safeguard the security and privacy of data.

This article has been able only to outline some of the ways in which computers can be of assistance to those involved in theological work. Much of the material available is geared for the lay or popular market rather than the academic, and it is difficult to keep up to date in such a fast moving field. However, readers will be able to move on from the suggestions mentioned here to develop their own understanding through discussion with colleagues, the large number of books, magazines, computer clubs and courses that are available in their area, and by information available on Internet.¹⁷

¹⁶ 'Shareware' is a system of marketing software written often by small and innovative authors by which the product (fully protected by copyright and patent) is circulated freely (by disk, over the Internet, Bulletin Boards etc) so potential purchasers can try it out and then pay a modest registration fee if they wish to continue using it; sometimes 'shareware' products do not have full functionality (e.g., a limited number of uses, printing of documents disabled). 'Public domain' software has been handed over for free public use by the authors without any charge or claim on it by the author.

¹⁷ For additional suggestions and details, see the material offered by Harry Hahne of Ontario Theological Seminary on 'Using a Computer in Biblical and Theological Studies' at his home page,

Dr. David Parker is Book Review Editor of the *Evangelical Review of Theology* and author of *Getting Started with Computing* (Church Archivist Society 1989).

Indian Spirituality: in Search of Truth and Reality

Kathleen Nicholls

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In this moving article the author contrasts the intense Hindu search for truth, love and reality through four millennia of Indian culture with the more recent, but equally intense, Indian Christian experience of God in Christ. The language of poetry rather than prose, of symbols rather than ideas is shown to be the most effective vehicle of this search and its anguish. While Hindu spirituality focuses on the self in search of the Ultimate Self, Christian spirituality reaches out with the love of God in love and compassion to the poor, the marginalized and all who suffer. In this context, the Cross and the Resurrection shine as light in the midst of darkness.

Editor

Keywords: Hinduism, truth, life, love, awe, reverence, Incarnation, release, deliverance, grace, symbolism, austerity, ascetism, guru

As we look back over India's history as far as the Indus Valley civilization, we are conscious of 5000 years of search—a long, long search for truth and reality.

One of the strands of this search appears in Vedic times, somewhere in the second millennium B.C. as waves of Aryans migrated to India. Ritual sacrifice was made to a variety of gods who were personifications of the power of nature which affected people's daily lives. The concept of propitiation and expiation of the deities took shape in Vedic times.

With the development of the various schools of philosophy, we see the emergence of a new concept of deity, the 'descended' or *avatar*. The *Ramayana* demonstrates ideal behaviour towards family and community in the life of the avatar: Rama. The *Mahabharata* seeks to answer the moral and social problems of the times. In the 'Song of the Lord' (**the Bhagwad Gita**), we see the first suggestion that God can love man and man love God, as Krishna, disguised as the charioteer, converses with Arjuna.

www.chass.utoronto.ca/~hahne/harry.html and at www.chass.utoronto.ca/~hahne/scintro.htm. For some software of interest to theologians, see www.pitts.emory.edu/bob/theosoft.html. Somewhat dated printed works include Jeffrey Hsu, *A Comprehensive Guide to Computer Bible Study* (Dallas Word, 1993), and John J. Hughes, *Bits, Bytes and Biblical Studies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987). Jason D. Baker maintains a Web page supplement to his *Christian Cyberspace Companion* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) on www.bakerbooks.com/cc. Another list of books is found at <http://bible.acu.edu/ctt/ccbiblio.html>

As the philosophical ideas were developed in the *Upanishads*, the strand of synthesis of ideas and cultic practices became more evident. Hinduism became eclectic, drawing together diverse religious concepts and practices. Since then the ideals and ethical beliefs of various religions, including Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, have been absorbed and adapted. Modern secularism and evolutionary science have led to further adaptation.

The Hebrew children of Israel, on the other hand, emphasised *analysis* rather than synthesis, the concrete rather than the philosophical. The Old Testament writers were concerned with the God of history, the God who acts.

The poets of the biblical Psalms spoke of God's chosen King as one who controls history:

Why do the nations plan rebellion?
 Why do the people make their useless
 plots?
 Their kings revolt,
 Their rulers plot together against the
 Lord and against the King he chose.
 From his throne in heaven the Lord
 laughs and mocks their feeble plans
 and 'I will announce', says the King,
 'what the Lord has declared.
 He said to me, "You are my son;
 today I have become your father.
 Ask, and I will give you all the
 nations;
 the whole earth will be yours.
 You will break them with an iron rod;
 you will shatter them in pieces like
 a clay pot"

[Psalm 2:1, 2, 4, and 7, 8, 9.](#)

THE SEARCH FOR GOD AS TRUTH, LIFE AND LOVE

In the long history of Indian spirituality we see a search for the God who creates and saves. The familiar Hindu prayer expresses this search: 'From delusion lead me to truth. From darkness lead me to light. From death lead me to immortality.'¹

Poets have expressed this longing for peace, for truth and light with great intensity. Kabir the 14th century mystic weaver, searches in such passages as:

To whom shall I go to learn about my
 Beloved?
 Kabir says: As you never may find the
 forest if you ignore the tree,
 so He may never be found in abstractions.²

¹ *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1:3:28.

² *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, translated by Rabindranath Tagore, assisted by Evelyn Underhill, (India: Macmillan).

Princess Mira of Mewar belongs to the mystic school of poets. So great was the depth of this 16th century poet's devotion that she suffered persecution from her family. We hear Mirabai cry:

My Lord,
 You taught me love.
 Where have you gone?
 My faithful companion,
 You lit this candle of love:
 why have you abandoned me now?
 You set the raft of love a-sail
 And yet you forsook me
 On the high seas of pain;
 when will you return?
 Without you life means nothing.³

Rabindranath Tagore in *Gitanjali* cries out for light:

Light, oh where is the light?
 Kindle it with the burning fire of
 desire
 It thunders and the mind rushes
 screaming through the void.
 The night is black as a black
 Let not the hours
 pass by in the dark.
 Kindle the lamp of love with thy life.

The twentieth century poet Iqbal wrote of the perfect man as one 'who was truthful, compassionate and fearless and one who faced death with equanimity'.

You ask me the marks of a man of
 faith?
 When death comes to him, he has a
 smile on his lips.⁴

The response of Christian poets to the search for Truth reveals their experiencing of God as the personal and living God. Chandran Devanesan, former Principal of Madras Christian College and Vice-chancellor of N.E. Hills University cries for the touch of the Divine Potter's Hand in his *Spiritus Sanctus*.

O Spirit of God, mighty fire,
 glow in me, burn in me
 until Thy radiance fills my soul.
 O Spirit of God, mighty fire,
 may Thy heat consume my will
 until I burn for Thee.
 May the flames of Thy love

³ Translated by Pritish Nandy.

⁴ Iqbal, Muhammad, *Shikwa and Jawabi-Shikwa*, translated from the Urdu with an introduction by Kushwant Singh (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981).

ever blaze upon the altar
of my heart.⁵

Narayan Waman Tilak, Maharashtra's outstanding Christian poet and patriot, evangelist and social worker contributed this lyric to Marathi hymnody:

From this day onwards Thou art
mine
Brother beloved and King Divine,
from this day on.
To Thee I offer child and wife,
My home and all my worldly life,
To Thee surrender everything.
My very self henceforth is Thine.
O take it, Lord, for Thou art mine
Brother beloved and King Divine
My thoughts and words are all of
Thee
Thou Wisdom, Joy and Liberty
Now Thee and me no rift can part.
One not in semblance but in heart
Set free am I, and for me shine
The joys of heaven
Since Thou art mine
Brother beloved and King Divine
From this day on.⁶

The outstanding Tamilian poet, H.A. Krishna Pillai, became a Christian as a mature man. His knowledge of Hinduism and of Tamil literature is evident in his poetry. In one of his lyrics, *Saccidananda* he says:

God is far from mysterious. He is 'father, mother and all Him . . . my preceptor too . . . my riches and my friend beside . . .'

Melting in compassion, for us, poor
souls,
Thou gav'st Thy life, and redeemed
us;
What recompense for this?
Taking me in Thy charge, to the very
end,
Save me, who have no claim on Thee.
I have no right to ask thus—
But dear Lord, who but Thee can be
my kin
My refuge sure?⁷

AWE AND REVERENCE

⁵ Devenesan, Chandran, *The Cross is Lifted* (New York: Friendship Press, 1954), p. 14.

⁶ *Upasana Sangeet*, No. 117.

⁷ Appasamy, A.J., *Tamil Christian Poet* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1966), p. 76.

In Hindu worship, the consciousness of the presence of the unknown produces a sense of awe and mystery in the more than casual worshipper. This is manifested in prolonged periods of silence and meditation, in exercising care in ritual bathing and the removing of shoes and sandals during worship, in visits to holy places—to temples, guradwaras and shrines and in pilgrimages to distant places.

The Christian poets, while aware of this mystery and filled with reverence, find that in Christ there is an open secret. In the Incarnation, God *revealed* himself in Christ. In Christ's life, death and resurrection, God is *with* us—Father, Son Holy Spirit.

There is no sentimentalising of the Nativity in Chandran's *Immanuel*:

God of God
crying in the night
a familiar, homely human sound
like the sound of hooves on
flagstones
like the rattle of chains tethering
cattle
like the crunch of straw in the
mouths of of oxen
like the rustle of hay tossed into a
manger.

And through 'Light' and 'Very God' to the awesome, prophetic conclusion:

God with us
terribly simply with us
And the shadows of men
with arms outstretched to take Him
fall across the manger
in the form of a cross⁸

Hilda Raj in her unpublished poem, *Easter* reveals more of the open secret:

Gethsemane I knew not, Lord,
I cared not what Thy captors did,
Nor wept to see Thee on the Cross
I did not mock Thy pain, nor asked
Thy love; no incense did I bear
To where Thy body lay, nor saw
The empty tomb; no angel spoke
Me fair. I sought Thee not with tears,
I knew no bliss like hers who heard
Thy voice and answered 'Rabboni'.
Within for fear, the door shut fast
At last I heard thee seek me out;
'All hail, and peace'—My Lord, my
God!

THE QUEST FOR RELEASE AND DELIVERANCE

By the law of *karma*, wrong actions lead inexorably to suffering and unending human existence. Only good actions can free one from this bondage. This law cannot be

⁸ Devanesan, Chandran, op. cit. pp. 12 and 13.

changed—by man, by priest, by guru, by God. God *can* create new forms or actions, but not for any particular purpose; this is his sport or *lila*.

In tandem with the law of *karma* is *samsara*, the transmigration of the soul. Bodily released from changes, the soul transmigrates from body to body carrying its load of *karma* with it.

In order that future existences maybe conditioned by good deeds in this life a devout Hindu will seek to walk on one or more of the paths to salvation.

He may seek to achieve spiritual deliverance through *karma marga*. His religious duties will be performed as an offering to God. *Bhakti*, the way of love and of utter devotion, may depend on ritualistic worship, but it may seek direct communion with God. The attitude may be that of a servant to a master, wife to husband, man to friend.

For the intellectual few, *jnana marga* (higher knowledge or spiritual insight) is the path. The poets have described these paths.

Nimmi Prarembi, psychology lecturer in a Delhi women's college, expresses the longing for deeper communion in her unpublished poem, *Butterfly Heart*. A Christian herself, she has felt, like many of us, the longing to be lost in contemplation of the Lord, and our frustration at the distracting thoughts that creep in:

In this past week
I have come every day
to sit in your Presence.

Not once have I come.
The held chair that
Held but a part of me.
My mind and my body
were with you, my Lord.

My like a heart,
fluttered through cool butterfly
and pastel meadows
drinking honey into itself. flowers

Today
I come
But with my butterfly heart,
And I lay its poor gatherings
At your feet.
I am your ashamed,
For your fragrance
is fresher than the perfume
upon my wings,
And from your lips
I am drunk
with joy.⁹

Iqbal believed that anything good came from a ceaselessly agitated mind:

Khuda tujhey kisee toofan ashna kar
dey

⁹ Unpublished

Thence compassion's rain poured and poured
in matchless flow.
This holy flood gathering in a stream
wends its way forever in that blessed land—
the waters of eternal—the living Ganga.¹²

Another of the great Tamil poets, Vedanayagam Shastriar wrote long poems on various aspects of God's grace. *Perimbakadal* is a series of thoughts on the birth and sufferings of Christ, *Balacrithiran* deals with Jesus' incarnation and *Gnanavula* praises God's mercy and love. The latter themes are developed in *Parasparakanni*.

Narayan Waman Tilak had planned to write eleven books on the life of Christ. Only the first book of the *Christayana* was completed before his death. His wife courageously added 64 chapters to those already written. Unfortunately the force of the Marathi *ovi* metre is somewhat lost in translation although the translator has achieved a rhyme scheme. In his invocation, Tilak writes:

Lord of the world, hail, hail to thee!
Creator, Sovereign, Saviour Thou!
Joy of the saints, let all things bow
In worship of Thy Majesty!
Thou needest not that we should frame
A thousand names to hymn thy praise,
Children unskilled in scholar's ways
We hail thee by the children's name
Father! Dear home of all our trust,
What loving kindness has Thou shown
That as Thy children Thou should'st own
Frail worthless creatures of the dust
Lord Jesus Christ, all praise be Thine!
Thee saviour of the world we own.
'Tis Thou to fallen man has shown
The wonder of the Lord divine.¹³

Prabhu Guptara, one of our younger poets, in his *Meditation on Good Friday* has much to say about God's Amazing Grace. He concludes:

Among the crowds,
Many billion
Tourists sightseers,
jeerers, scoffers, hangers-on
some had eyes
It is not only
the Friday that had to become bad
before it could ever be good
that brings us face to face with reality
We were done with him

¹² Compiled by Appasamy, A.J., *Tamil Christian Poet*, op. cit., p. 45.

¹³ Tilak, N.W., *Bhakti Niranjana*, pp. 3 and 5.

but
is not done with us.¹⁴

he

SYMBOLISM

What is a symbol? Usually it is a visible object which represents a similarity to something not shown but realised through association. A message can be conveyed across the language barrier in a symbolic representation. If used well, this can inspire understanding and mutual response.

In the history of Indian spirituality symbols have been important. Symbols of sound have had their place in the ringing of bells and the blowing of conch shells. The most important sound has, of course, been that of OM, representing Absolute Reality. Symbols to touch and symbols of design have also had their place. Idols are often worn as symbols, lamps are a means to the light. The statues and small temples around a Hindu temple are meant to be seen by the pilgrim as he moves from image to image into the sanctuary from the light of day to the superluminous darkness. A Hindu woman is not dressed until she has applied *sindur* to her hair parting and *bindi* to her forehead.

In a valid and necessary search for Indian expression of worship and witness, Christians have sometimes been more enthusiastic than wise. The bells used in worship are not always appropriate ones. OM has been used to represent the revealed trinity. The controversy over the application of *bindi* continues unabated. Does it represent Parwati's menstrual flow, Shiva's blood, woman's subjugation, or is it now purely cosmetic? Should a Christian woman apply a cross instead?

No symbol is sacred in itself. Whether I wear a cross, install a stained glass window or buy a painting of the Holy Family, these have no magic powers in themselves. Stained glass breaks, silver melts, paintings burn. They can be only illustrations leading to contemplation of our Lord.

One symbol appearing through out history is that of the tree. Again and again in Indian religious and philosophical writings it deals with the nature of God's being and activity. The Upanishads may say that:

*The One stands like a tree
established in the heaven,
By him, by the Purusha
the whole world is filled.*

Rabindranath Tagore pleads:

*Send the love that would soak down into
the centre of being
and that from there would spread
like the unseen sap
Through the branching trees of life
giving birth to fruits and flowers*

I like Chandra Devanesan's use of the symbol:

*O Tree of Calvary
send your roots deep down
into my heart.
Gather together the soil of my heart,*

¹⁴ Prabhu Gupthara, *Beginnings*.

*the sands of my fickleness
the stones of my stubbornness
the mud of my desires
Bind them all together,
O Tree of Calvary,
interlace them with thy
strong roots,
entwine them with the network of thy love.*¹⁵

Sadhu Sundar Singh the Punjabi convert and evangelist writes:

True Christians who bear their cross die, yet they live, and in the midst of persecution are like the leaves of a tree which fall in winter only to appear in renewed vigour in the spring and prove they are really living. ([2 Cor. 4:8-10](#) and [6:4-10](#))
In spite of sorrow and suffering their life is hid in God.

Prabhu Guptara in *Prayer 2* agonizes:

*I don't want to move mountains, Lord
But to be moved
into your image
For I am in a strait 'twixt
twenty, crucified between what I believe
and what I am
Only your love
earthed by a tree
holds me.*¹⁶

The theme of God as the heavenly painter has been popular with poets, but some of our Christian poets have used the symbol differently. Chandran Devanesan writes:

*Lord,
I am a painter
and Thou
art my subject.
But my portrait will never be complete
for thou art infinite
like the eternal colour-pageant
of Nature.*¹⁷

New symbols have evolved. In South India, the banana tree with its little suckers sending out feelers for nourishment has come to represent eternal life. Old symbols have been given new content: A ship has come to represent the Church tossed by storm, persecution and heresy, many functioning for the good of all.

Christian poets could never begin to exhaust the biblical symbols: the Hand of God, the animals with their various attributes, the symbols of man and his world, his relationships and his walk with God. So Paul speaks of the master/slave relationships; he urges his readers to take the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith. Jesus speaks of a house on a rock, a city set on a hill, of wheat and weeds.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Guptara, *op. cit.* p. 30.

¹⁷ Devanesan, *op. cit.* 'The infinite Christ', pp. 14 and 15.

THE WAY OF AUSTERITY AND ASCETICISM

One of the aims of the deeply spiritual man is to control and subdue the body so that complete attention can be given to God. One of the aids to this is *yoga* which by physiological and psychological means allows the devotee to control all physical and psychic energy with the aim of achieving spiritual perfection. Restraint and denial of the body, strict observance, and erect but relaxed posture, regulation of breathing, the withdrawal of the senses, concentration on a fixed spot or object, meditation and finally *samadhi* with the cessation of all activity are to be aimed for.

The negation of the world in poverty and fasting and the negating of life in the attainment of *brahmacharya* or total abstinence are the goals of holy men.

Simplicity of life is a goal that all of us should seek, but to what end? For the Christian, the disciples bring the self under the power of the Holy Spirit so that we might better express our love for God and for our neighbour. Prabhu Guptara has some very cutting things to say about the superficial and self-indulgent celebration of Christmas in *A Madness*:

Christmas *pudding* *doesn't* *really* *say*
anything *about*
the *pain* *of* *childbirth*
or *the* *humiliation* *that* *even* *a*
company *director* *would* *feel* *if*
his *son* *were,* *quite* *accidentally,*
born *in* *a* *carpenter's* *home*
How *could* *you,*
ever *possibly* *think,*
Lord, *that* *your*
son *was* *worth*
*me?*¹⁸

In another poem, *Christmas* he says:

Not *the* *superficiality* *of*
smartly *dressed* *suburbanites*
window *shopping* *for* *something* *nice,*
the *soft* *sentimentality* *of*
grinning *niceness*
for *a* *season,*
or *Santa* *Claus* *carousel* *and* *turkey.*
Christmas. *For* *the* *first* *time*
I *can* *look* *into* *God's* *eyes*
feel *his* *hand* *on* *my* *shoulder*
encouraging, *resting,*
*being with me.*¹⁹

One of the most powerful poems demonstrating the need for simplicity in order to serve our neighbour is Chandran Devaneson's *Lines to a Rickshaw Puller*. The poet describes the life of a man in vivid terms—a life that led to expressions of 'unconscious communism'. Then, says Devaneson:

¹⁸ Guptara, op. cit. p. 22.

¹⁹ Guptara, op. cit. p. 23.

I pass you by like a hundred others
 who also pass you by—
 and the road may be the road
 from Jerusalem to Jericho for all we know.

I would like to put my hand on your shoulder
 and say to you 'Comrade,
 there is one Who died for us
 and dying made us blood brothers.'
 But I am filled with the cowardice of the well-dressed—
 for clothes are by no means flimsy
 when it comes to erecting barriers
 between man and man.
 I am afraid you will wake with a start
 and betray resentment in your eyes
 as you see in me what I really am—
 your well-dressed enemy.
 And then you will acknowledge defeat
 and put on your mask of patient stupidity,
 you will jump up and dust the seat
 and grin and point to it with a flourish of your hand.
 You will want us to sell our brotherhood
 for eight annas

Day after day I pass you by,
 you the man by the road side
 and I the priest and the Levite rolled in one,
 passing you by.²⁰

Narayan Waman Tilak's life was spent breathing the attitude of concern for his neighbour. He was prepared to give away money—even when he did not have it—food, clothes, cooking utensils (sometimes to his wife's bewilderment!), life itself to those in need. I have not found any reference to 'social service' in Tilak's poetry. I have found much of devotion to Christ. His poems overflow with devotion and a sense of servanthood; his life was the practical outworking of these attributes. One area of concern for others that does come through in his writings is his deep love and hope for his country. From the *Christayana*:

Whatever I have shed of tears
 For Mother India in past years
 A woven garland now appears
 Laid, cleansed of fears at Thy blest feet
 And in the days to come, what more
 Of sorrow may yet be in store—
 My Motherland and (though so poor)
 Myself I pour into Thy hands.²¹

(This translation by Bishop Philip Loyd is a happier one than many translations of Tilak's poems retaining as it does the original marathi *Ovi* metre.)

One of his passionate songs about India is, I believe, the result of his agony at being accused of adopting a 'foreign' religion:

²⁰ Devaneson, op. cit. pp. 47, 48.

²¹ Tilak, N.W., *From Brahma to Christ* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), p. 91.

Bran shall I eat and grass shall I wear for the sake of thy love, my Motherland and I shall throw in the dust all that passes for glory and happiness . . .

My body will I sacrifice, my life will I lay down in the service of my noble land. Some will laugh and some will cry at this ecstasy of love. But I heed them not. Born to fulfil my relationship as a son of Thee, I will fulfil it. May God help me . . .²²

Hetty Prim is so saddened by the lack of love in mankind for mankind that she declares *I Cannot Go To Church*:

They stroke guitars and pet dogs,
 Wear crosses round their necks
 With hatred on their foreheads
 And blood-lust in their jests.
 I walked the road to Calvary;
 I found nobody there
 Except a bleak-eyed leper
 All knotted up in prayer;
 His hands like roots and tubers,
 His feet like mangled clay,
 His eyes twin pools of anguish
 So far from amber day.
 I will not go to church my friend
 Until I find God there,
 Till all the moneymakers move
 To let in God's heavenly air,
 Till the poor are loved and cherished
 and the women are set free,
 Till I can meet my Lord again
 and worship bold and free,
 Till I can hold my brother's hand
 and go towards our Lord
 To kneel in adoration
 and acclaim Him as our God.²³

And Victor Gaikwad in *Administration Slips* laments the lack of ethics and helpfulness in a country that is the home of religious people.

If something were to go wrong,
 with the tap again it can't
 be repaired without the cracked
 washbasin collapsing (duly recorded,
 cracked before occupation). 'Please
 give me a new one', I said.
 The MES replied, 'It can't be done;
 just like that. Get the RMO's certificate
 that the washbasin is unhygienic
 and we'll give you a new one.
 He's your friend. No problem.'
 He smiled. I shrank (unpublished).

THE NEED FOR A GURU/ACHARYA

²² *ibid.*

²³ Hetty Prim, *I Cannot Go to Church*.

The functions of the *guru* were given elevation by the Siva Siddhanta sect of South India during the Puranic era. Siva might appear in any form to help his devotees, the chief form being that of the guru or teacher. In Sikhism *Nanak* organized his disciples into a close-knit community with himself as the first guru. The Sikh tradition of guru plays a mediating role in a Sikh's search for mystical union with the Formless One.

Today the modern gurus and godmen such as Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Satya Sai Baba and Rajneesh have given Hinduism a popular appeal. With them the problems of modern man are discussed and solutions sought. As man has reacted against the dehumanizing effects of our present day society, he has to resort to various types of mystical experience. The modern Hindu gurus have taken advantage of the modern Indian's consciousness of a vacuum in life. So we have gurus offering in exchange for complete surrender, physical experiences. Some South Indian Gurus claim to have supernatural powers. Others have updated Tantric techniques of attaining super-consciousness. The most influential have been those offering peace and energy along with intellectual alternatives to present secular world views.

Mirabai, the Rajasthani princess, mentioned her teacher, Raidas in some of her songs. Tayamanavar an 18th century steward of a Chola prince was very much influenced by his guru 'the teacher of the silence'. This guru persuaded him not to retire from the world but to stay still in the secular world, so he could write:

*Place has no power to poison his presence
No-one can say 'He is here, He is there'.
Not in this place, not in that, is the Godhead.
Unbounded by places he abides everywhere.*

Ramalinga Swami looked on his eldest brother and a teacher from Kanjeevaram as his *gurus*. He eventually gathered a great many disciples around him and built a home of Charity and a Hall of Wisdom. Although he is comparatively modern (born 1823), he has a respected place in Tamil literature. Deep religion and a wide charity for all living beings mark his work. From **Confession**:

I am the greatest sinner among sinners, unwilling to part with even a grain of rice for a noisy crowd.
Like the fly buzzing about without any rest, I seek O father; tell me what to do that I may not die, and grant me thy grace to support me.²⁵

Tukuram, the seventeenth century grain seller and poet, was visited in a dream by a mysterious teacher, Babuji, whose teaching indicates that Tukuram may have come under the influence of the Vaishnavite sect. It is difficult to choose from his prolific writing. The following is a sample of his sense of values:

*Some stones excel others in quality; they are priceless and illustrious.
Some are found in the homes of rich
and poor, but a few are highly valued.
Some lie glittering on sandbanks,
but no-one would cast a glance at them.
Everything is blest and prosperous
in its own place; the misery of poverty
is an illusion.²⁶*

²⁵ *ibid* p. 52.

²⁶ *ibid* p. 117.

What of the Christian poets? Have they found a teacher who has experienced truth? One who chooses disciples and passes on the secret of the truth? As we read their poetry, we find that in Jesus, the Word, they have found their *guru*, their *Sat-guru Maharaj*, their eternal teacher, the King. Says Pallai:

He is the supreme, the Ancient of days,
the transcendent, Invisible Plenitude,
Immanent yet above all things,
Three-fold relation, pure, unrelated
knowledge beyond knowledge
The Father, Son, Supreme Lord, unborn,
the seedless seed of tree becoming
the cause of all, Creator, Providence,
Lord of the Universe.
The infinite and perfect Word,
the Supreme Person begotten,
sharing in the Father's nature,
Conscious by essence, Jesus Christ.²⁷

Narayan Waman Tilak writes in *Guru and Disciple*:

One moment rain, one moment sunshine
then a beautiful mingling of the two
So it is in nature and so is it within my heart.
How much joy have I had in Thy company!
I cannot describe it, O Christ, but my mind
goes wild at the very remembrance.
At one time I said, 'Thou art my guru
I must be careful to behave with Thee as a disciple,'
I sat at a distance in reverential fear;
I tried to gain some sort of intellectual comprehension
of Thee.
But you spoilt it all with a smile!
My efforts were all useless.
I jumped up and ran to you and flung my arms around your neck, laughing.
O Lord, I cannot keep my proper place with Thee;
The servant says—how can Disunion and Friendship
ever remain together²⁸

The experience and writings of the Christian poets we have listened to indicate a number of guidelines. They suggest that as Christians, we can draw on the wealth of traditional Indian spirituality. We must reject everything that is idolatrous, immoral and contrary to biblical revelation.

The coming of Christ brings new dimensions into our lives. The past, with all its glories is transcended by the glory of the unique Christ. The hope that these poets experienced in the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is the fruit of the search for truth. Could it be better expressed than in the words of Chandran Devaneson's *The Cross is Lifted*?

Two thousand years have slipped by
like freshets in the Ganges

²⁷ Appasamy, A.J., *Tamil Christian Poet*, op. cit., p. 80.

²⁸ Jacob, P.S., *The Experiential Response of Narayan Waman Tilak*, (CISRS, 1979), p. 113.

since St. Thomas came to our land.
 Here, though the cross is lifted
 amidst the paddy fields and coconut palms
 and white clad Christians flock to the churches
 when the bells call them to worship;
 our wise men have not yet seen the star
 and the manger of Bethlehem
 is not yet the cradle of our land
 But Christian hope never dies
 and the ends of the strands of destiny
 are held safe in the hands of God.
 Pass it on to ends of the earth!
 Christ is the answer—Ours! Yours!²⁹

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Book Reviews

ERT (1998) 22:4, -377 0144-8153

THE BOOK OF ACTS IN ITS FIRST CENTURY SETTING: VOL. 1. THE BOOK OF ACTS IN ITS ANCIENT LITERARY SETTING

Edited by Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1993, 479pp. h/b. No bibliography. Indices of Biblical References, Ancient Authors, Modern Authors and Subjects, ISBN 0-8028-2433-1

Reviewed by Norman T. Barker

(Queensland Presbyterian Theological Hall, Emmanuel College, St Lucia, Queensland, Australia)

This is a valuable aid to the appreciation and understanding of the Book of Acts. The material from a wide range of ancient literature illuminates many of the critical questions that arise in the study of Acts and makes a notable contribution to interpretation.

Acts occupies a unique position in the NT. Closely related on the one hand to the Gospels, and on the other to the Epistles, it provides a bridge between Jesus and the Church. Traditionally titled 'The Acts of the Apostles', it could be described more accurately as 'some acts of some apostles'.

This is the first of a projected new series on the literary, political, social, religious and theological background of the Book of Acts. Consulting editors for the series are I. Howard Marshall and David W.J. Gill. Volume 1 has been edited by Dr. Bruce W. Winter, Warden of Tyndale House, Cambridge and a member of the Divinity Faculty, Cambridge University, and Andrew D. Clarke, research librarian at Tyndale House. The editors expect that all volumes within the series will be published within two years.

²⁹ Devaneson, op. cit, frontispiece.

The first volume has drawn on a wide range of contributors from Britain, Australia and the USA. The contributors bring together the insights of those whose speciality is ancient history and the classics of the Graeco-Roman world with biblical scholars.

The survey is wide-ranging. Two chapters deal with ancient literary *genres* that have been suggested for Acts, the 'historical monograph' and 'intellectual biography'. Two chapters relate Acts to biblical history, with which it shares both literary techniques and a basic theological understanding of history, evident particularly in the focus on 'fulfilment'. The next two chapters relate Acts to subsequent comparable Christian works, the second century apocryphal *Acts of Paul* and fourth century ecclesiastical histories, particularly that of Eusebius. Three chapters then deal with the relationship between Acts and the third gospel, and Acts and the Pauline corpus. Conventions prevalent in the Graeco-Roman world with relation to public speaking, forensic speeches in particular, and classical rhetoric are next discussed. The final chapter surveys modern literary approaches to Acts and an appendix discusses the related literary problem of the actual text of Acts, where the 'Western text' is of considerably greater length. There are extensive indexes of biblical references, ancient and modern authors quoted, and subjects, but no bibliography.

Volume 1 of the new series interacts with the considerable interest in literary approaches to biblical interpretation over the past several decades. Stress on the biblical writers as theologians rather than mere chroniclers has brought fresh understandings to our reading of the Gospels and Acts in particular. Such literary and theological approaches have often led to negative evaluation, and sometimes thoroughgoing scepticism, of historical content.

Winter and Clarke's volume constitutes a healthy correction to some of these judgments. It provides many insights into not only Luke's literary method but the interpretation of key features of Acts. For example, on the question of the authenticity of the Acts speeches, discussion of the theory and practice of a number of ancient historians, and ancient understandings of speech as **event** rather than mere words, gave to this reviewer both a new appreciation of Luke's skill as well as confidence in the authenticity of his record. (Those who have noted a missing dimension in written sermons should not feel too superior to ancient historians).

Some key questions still haunt the modern church, such as the interpretation of Paul's strictures on women's ministry in [1 Tim. 2](#) in particular. Apart from the similar literary structure of the *Acts of Paul* as a travel narrative which, it is argued, seeks to narrate the later history of Paul inferred from references in the Pastorals, there is the intriguing difference between the assessment of women's place in the *Acts of Paul* and that in the Pastorals. The *Acts of Paul* presents a 'socially radical' Paul as against the 'socially conservative' Paul of the Pastorals, while its asceticism, more in keeping with [1 Cor. 7](#), is countered by affirmation of marriage in the Pastorals. Some would like to have more details on the context and background of [1 Tim. 2](#). As the Pastorals, in contrast to the *Acts of Paul*, reveal a polemic tone, could it be that the *Acts of Paul* reflects traditions within the Pauline circle concerning women to which the Pastorals react?

As an example of how interpretation is enriched, Winter's own chapter on conventions in court proceedings throw a great deal of light on the forensic speeches in Paul. Moderns are likely to be amazed by the apparent flattering of the presiding judge, not only by Tertullus, but also by Paul himself ([Acts 24:1-8](#); [24:10b-21](#)). Recognition that both speakers were following conventional courtesies in ancient court proceedings, particularly in respect to the opening *captatio benevolentiae*, throws a different light on our understanding. Each is seen as carefully relating the aspects of the judge that would have bearing on the prosecution and defence respectively.

This first volume shows promise of an exciting and rewarding series. It is beautifully produced, with only a few printing errors detected.

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THE MISSIONARY MOVEMENT IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY: STUDIES IN THE TRANSMISSION OF FAITH

by Andrew F. Walls

Orbis/T & T Clark, 1996, xix + 266pp., £13.95,

ISBN 0-567-08515-5

Reviewed by Howard Peskett

(Trinity College, Bristol, UK), in ANVIL Volume 14, No 3, 1997

'Western intellectual discourse needs to come to terms with Christianity as a non-Western religion' (xix). 'The whole of Owen Chadwick's magisterial, two-volume, 1116 page history of the Victorian Church contains no section or chapter on the Victorian missionary movement' (144). 'The global transformation of Christianity requires nothing less than the complete rethinking of the church history syllabus' (145). 'Christianity is in principle perhaps the most syncretistic of the great religions' (173). 'The main missionary achievement of the nineteenth century was the Christianising of the United States' (227). 'The voluntary society is one of God's theological jokes' (246).

There are nineteen chapters in this fascinating, entertaining, sympathetic, surprising book, by the founder of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World. It is a collection of minimally revised essays, of varied length, written between 1971 and 1994. There is a certain helpful repetitiveness. Prof. Walls writes softly; he often upsets traditional assumptions, but without stridency; he has a puckish, donnish sense of humour; and his capacious memory is full of astonishing facts.

The whole book reflects Andrew Walls' fascination with the transmission of the Christian faith (more specifically, its translation) into many languages and cultures; the concepts involved (part one); the agents of that transmission (part three), and its objects or results (part two). He is hugely and justifiably impressed by the vast, culturally diverse mosaic of the world Christian movement; he reveals something of the diversity both horizontally (across cultures) and vertically (down time); he reflects on the changes in form and content which have taken and are taking place; and he reminds us that Christ's new humanity needs all the cultural variety that six continents and scores of generations bring.

Part one (72 pp.) is an invigorating reminder that there are two major principles at work in the transmission of the Christian faith: an indigenizing, localizing, vernacular principle that roots Christianity in a particular place, time and culture; and a pilgrim, universalizing principle which reminds Christians that here they have no abiding city; they are part of a worldwide, time-long movement that resists any idea of one expression of Christianity ruling everywhere. All our Christianities are partial Christianities: what we see of the Jesus-play is restricted by where in the theatre we sit. A thorough absorption of this section of the book should make us more curious, catholic, hospitable.

Part two (60 pp.) casts a friendly, astringent eye over African missionary movements (especially from Sierra Leone); the ways in which African independent churches have and have not conformed to the so-called 'older' churches; and the various responses of primal religionists to the cataclysmic changes that have engulfed their societies since World War Two. It is not so much secularization that is astonishing; what is astonishing is the resilience of religious beliefs!

Part three (118 pp.) dips into the colourful, variegated stream of men and women who have been the agents of the transmission of the Christian faith: who they were, how they were called; what they thought of non-western art and 'heathen' beliefs; how some of them became scholars; the importance of medical missionaries; the recent dominance of Americans and its repercussions and two chapters which reflect on the emergence and influence of the voluntary agency (the missionary society), and what equally disturbing evangelistic instruments may be needed for the contemporary task of evangelization.

This book opens a window for us on to a world larger than the one we usually inhabit, because the task of translation and transmission, locally and globally is never ending. Many depressed western Christians need to be reminded of what someone (not Walls) has said: 'God will not permit Satan to extinguish a fire which he has kindled to warm the whole world.'

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BLENDED WORSHIP: ACHIEVING SUBSTANCE AND RELEVANCE IN WORSHIP

by Robert E. Webber

Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1996, ISBN 1-56563-245-1, Pb 181pp

Reviewed by David Parker

In this popular level book, Robert E. Webber presents a vision of worship that is both relevant to the contemporary culture and yet firmly based in biblical truth and early Christian patterns. Webber, who has taught theology at Wheaton Graduate School for thirty years, is a prolific author on worship and is now widely experienced in presenting seminars for churches on blended worship. The aim, as he puts it, is to achieve 'substance and relevance', but to judge by the experience of many churches in the west which seem to have difficulty in finding an effective balance, this is not an easy task without clear principles and objectives.

Some readers may be disappointed that Webber does not concentrate as much as might be expected on the type of worship that has emerged in many areas as a direct and sometimes strident reaction to traditional Protestant worship. This 'contemporary worship' places a great deal of emphasis upon modern music as the main, even exclusive, mode of worship.

Instead of analysing this trend and showing how this contemporary worship could be blended with the classic pattern, he covers a much wider range, including what he calls liturgical worship, traditional protestant worship, the creative/contemporary model, and the praise and worship/charismatic style. But the main emphasis is upon expressing the key elements of the early Christian worship in a contemporary style, rather than the reverse. In fact, this book seems to take the position that contemporary worship cannot make any other contribution except style and mood, and that the essential structures and theology of worship are to be found elsewhere. While this may beg the question of the validity of the principles that control much contemporary worship, it does focus on the importance of substance, content and depth in worship and consciousness of the multi-faceted heritage of the church.

This approach accounts for the author's many references to Orthodox, Catholic and Anglican worship (reflecting his own Anglican churchmanship), and his numerous reports (often first hand) of churches in these groups which have found meaningful renewal of their worship as a result of the greater openness to other traditions, cultures and patterns that is typical of the contemporary scene. It also explains why many of his

illustrations refer to churches in the revivalistic and praise traditions which are now incorporating practices usually associated with the liturgical tradition in their efforts to find deeper reality.

But it is no mere superficial blending of the new with the old that he advocates. Consistent with his earlier publications on worship, he shows the value and necessity of a fourfold structure in worship that reflects the gospel. This structure, which is exemplified in authentic worship, includes: entering God's presence and hearing him speak, responding with thanksgiving and being dismissed to love and serve. In parallel with this, he also advocates a structure to the church year to give it an 'evangelical meaning'. According to this pattern, the year commences with the 'cycle of life', consisting of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, which celebrate the coming of Christ and his manifestation to the Christian and to the world, this is followed by the 'cycle of life'—Lent, Holy Week, Easter and Pentecost, which calls the church into the pattern of new life in Christ. Following the same approach, Webber also offers a suggestive application of the ancient catechumenate to the modern practice of evangelism and discipleship, witness and service. Throughout, Webber shows how these structures can give the required substance to worship, and through many examples, illustrates how the ministry of Word and Sacred Act can be expressed authentically in music, art, drama and symbol.

These classic elements would probably be unfamiliar to many who would most benefit from them. However, if they take the trouble to work through them with the help of the many resources listed by the author and the summary statement of principles for 'the future convergence of worship', they will find a satisfying and effective blend of old and new in worship which is highly appropriate and meaningful in the new cultural context in which the church now lives.

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CHURCH PLANTING: LAYING FOUNDATIONS

by Stuart Murray

Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998, ISBN 0-85364-825-5, Pb 302pp, Bibliog.

Reviewed by David Parker

Stuart Murray, Director of Church Planting and Evangelism at Spurgeon's College, London, writes against the background of the 'rather frantic mood' of 'pre-millennial tension' which has produced a tendency to rush into planting large numbers of churches as an evangelistic outreach often without due regard for the fundamental theoretical issues raised by this activity. Relating especially to Britain where there are said to be in excess of 50,000 churches already (although church attendance is less than 10% and falling), he addresses church planting practitioners with theological questions about why new churches are needed, their type and nature in relation to existing churches, the process of church planting and its impact upon those involved, and other similar missiological matters.

An experienced church planter himself, he first deals with popular criticisms of the church planting movement, including the argument that there are enough churches already, that existing churches are weakened and that church planting has become an end itself. Giving carefully qualified answers to these points, he goes on to lay out the basic theological and biblical foundations with the aim of clarifying the role and methods of church planting. Warning against a pragmatic approach that rejects theological considerations on the one hand, and a naïve biblicism that treats the New Testament, especially the Acts, as if it were merely a manual for contemporary church planting, he points out that church planting is only one part of the overall mission of God, the *missio*

Dei. When this principle is kept in mind, according to Murray, church planting will not become the exclusive focus of church life, and neither will it be viewed as the prime or only form of evangelism. In a direct challenge to the view that planting new churches is the 'single most effective evangelistic methodology' he points out that 'Britain could be covered with churches within reach of every man, woman and child—and yet the mission of God might not have significantly advanced. . . . Church proliferation and church growth are not necessarily signs of progress' because 'an exclusive focus on church planting may distort the church's understanding of the mission of God and its role in this'. This approach is also reinforced by the consideration of two other theological themes, the incarnation which suggests a model for participation in the divine mission, and the kingdom of God with its vision of the goal of divine activity.

The author shows a wide acquaintance with the history and practice of church planting, and the contours of contemporary culture as he works through the range of issues relating to the task, shape and ethos of churches, their buildings, leadership and methodologies. In each case, he surveys a large spectrum of practical and theoretical possibilities, asking searching questions about their value and applicability and suggesting guidelines for thought and action. His burden throughout is to caution against an unprincipled and hasty pursuit of quantity. Instead he calls for consideration of the type of church required in a particular context, the relationships it has with those responsible for the plant, and whether the planting of a church of the type proposed will in fact extend the mission of God. He does not hesitate to subject popular models such as seeker-sensitive churches, saturation planting and mega-churches to careful scrutiny according to the theological principles he has outlined. His conclusions are even-handed and positive, but the reasoning and application of theological criteria are always rigorous and insightful.

The book thus focuses on principles, rather than particular solutions; but it is concerned that in the British situation at least new structures and forms of the church are a necessity for the post-modern, post-Christian age. However, in contrast with the emphasis throughout the rest of the book, there is little discussion of the theological principles used in deriving the model of post-modern church that it proposes. Although the author supports the commonly held assessment that attempts at ecumenical church planting have proved to be a failure, the changes he advocates have such far reaching implications for denominational churches that it is hard to see how they can be adopted without extensive theological adjustments.

Murray emerges as one who is neither an opponent or a naïve supporter of church planting, but as one who is alert to the dangers of both neglect and unprincipled pragmatism. 'Such pragmatism', he explains, 'needs to be accompanied and evaluated by theological reflection on the nature and task of the church and its role in society.' He emphasizes that 'Church planting is *not* just about establishing more churches. It is not even primarily about establishing more churches.' It is 'an opportunity for theological reflection and renewal, for asking radical questions about the nature of the church and its task in contemporary society, and for developing new kinds of churches. New churches are needed, not only to bring the Christian community closer to where people are geographically, but closer to where they are culturally, sociologically and spiritually.'

Church Planting will not be a popular book for some, but raises vital questions and presents a satisfying, well developed theological analysis of the issues involved in church planting, backed up by authentic experience. The value of the book lies in its ability to analyse the process and provide a model for readers to employ in their own situations; it will be most useful in countries like Britain, but the principles outlined are universally applicable. The use of footnotes instead of endnotes is to be welcomed, but the reversal of

Christian and surnames in book references as if they were a bibliography listing is annoying, as is the absence of an index; a select list of books on church planting is useful.
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STREAMS OF RENEWAL: THE ORIGINS AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT IN GREAT BRITAIN

by Peter Hocken
Carlisle: Paternoster Press,
(rev. edition) 1997,
ISBN 0-85364-805-0, Pb 301pp

Reviewed by David Parker

The major part of *Streams of Renewal* is a detailed, but somewhat tedious, chronicle of the various events and developments up to 1965 which resulted in the emergence of the Charismatic movement as a clearly defined part of British church life. Many of the names and places mentioned are not identified adequately enough to inform readers unfamiliar with the subject. In this highly sympathetic account of the period, the author seeks to support his case that the British movement was not imported from the United States, but had its beginnings as streams from various locations across the country discovered each other and came together on the basis of a common experience.

The story is not extended beyond 1965 because the author, a Roman Catholic theologian who was formerly Executive Secretary of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, believes that by then 'the main outlines of the new movement are clear, and all the major instruments used by the Holy Spirit are manifest'.

The narrative is in four stages, which are poorly marked in the structure of the book, although summary chapters help to overcome this problem. According to Hocken, the process commenced with a preliminary period up to about 1963 with people who had some Pentecostal links and experienced tongues and other pentecostal signs but were not fully part of that denominational tradition. These pioneers were marked by an expectation that the pentecostal experience would touch wider horizons than previously, but they were not conscious of any movement towards the renewal of the mainstream denominations.

It was only in the second stage that pentecostal patterns began to appear in the historic churches; the narrative refers especially to developments in the Church of England, including the London Healing Movement, St Bride's Prayer Meeting and particularly the 'revival-minded Anglicans' of All Soul's, Langham Place (which introduces Michael Harper into the story). Developments were most prominent during this period, 1962-63 (with precursors going back to the 1950s) amongst the evangelical Anglicans and the Open Brethren, although the catholic wing of the Anglican Church was not unaffected; as in the first stage, Hocken points to a considerable direct influence of Pentecostals on these events. Hocken also argues that this was the period when 'the Charismatic movement in Britain emerged from being a random range of uncoordinated blessings, mostly unknown to other recipients, to being consciously a single new movement of the Spirit' and 'a distinct movement' on its own terms, not just the 'further expansion of the Pentecostal movement'. It was a movement of the middle-class, concentrated in the South-West, London and the Home Counties.

In the third stage during the next year or so, the various streams 'came to be recognized and experienced as part of the one Charismatic movement', especially as a result of an important editorial by Philip Hughes in *The Churchman*, through the work of

Harper's Fountain Trust and the unifying ministry of David de Plessis who made several visits to Britain in 1963–64. Hocken is emphatic that the process was strengthened but not initiated by many reports which appeared during this period of the emergence of the Charismatic in the United States.

The final stage of the narrative up to the end of 1965 describes very briefly the further expansion of the movement into Baptist and other free and independent churches and the change in relationship at this time with the Pentecostals, who previously had been so influential. During this period, according to Hocken, 'it was clear both to Pentecostals and to charismatics that there was a new movement of the Holy Spirit, in most important ways similar to the original Pentecostal movement, but in some ways different'. These differences, some of them social, resulted in a clear demarcation of the two movements, and their relationships were 'more casual and occasional than their common experience of the Spirit would seem to have demanded'.

Hocken's summary chapters, which helpfully clarify the direction of the narrative, emphasize his case that the Charismatic movement is built upon a new relationship and experience of God, the baptism of the Spirit, with which the spiritual gifts are associated. He argues that it was a desire for this deeper knowledge of God on the part of individuals rather than an orchestrated campaign by organizations or prominent leaders that characterized the movement. In the earliest phases, he insists, the movement began because 'a range of people experienced the reality of God in the baptism of the Spirit' rather than accepting a common doctrinal viewpoint, having a burden for the renewal of the churches or being subject to the extension of a particular denominational tradition. The later stages of the movement were simply the 'rise of forms of fellowship and of skeletal organization giving social expression to this identity'.

Hocken's work (a revision of the 1986 edition) is essentially a narrative of a sharply restricted period in British church history, with little critical analysis of the events described and only a brief attempt at biblical or theological interpretation; there is therefore no examination of the basic assumption of the book that the experience which is said to be common to both Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement is what the New Testament means by 'Spirit baptism'. This accounts for an extremely confident claim with which the author climaxes his conclusions, viz., that 'the Charismatic movement being a movement of God the Holy Spirit [offers] Christian people an unprecedented opportunity for the renewal of the life of the whole body of Christ'.